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BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING OF ADOLESCENT CHILDREN IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The study examined barriers to effective parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained communities. A qualitative approach was adopted for data collection and analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to data acquired from a sample of parents from resource-constrained areas in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. Parents interviewed identified the following barriers: financial constraints, peer influence, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of adequate parental time, communication and maturational changes. Given the parental challenges emerging from the findings of the study, greater understanding of the conditions under which effective parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained societies can be fostered is essential.

Keywords: Barriers, parenting, adolescents, resource-constrained communities

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Parenting has been a focus of much interest and research for a few decades. Effective parenting has been almost universally acknowledged as being an essential part of child development (Cluver *et al.*, 2020; Cowan & Cowan, 2019). The environment established by parents is the major source of individual development and the fundamental setting in which children start to develop their societally appropriate beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours (Ogwo, 2013). Furthermore, it is the first environment that should provide care, nurturance and protection. Even in adolescence, the quality of parenting provides a crucial developmental setting that influences children's growth and wellbeing (Filus, Schwarz, Mylonas, Sam & Boski, 2019). However, unlike the case of early infancy, the impact of parenting techniques on adolescent development and wellbeing in South Africa has been understudied, particularly in low-income communities.

While adolescence is defined differently in different cultures, De La Fuente Robles and Martín Cano (2020) aver that it is widely agreed that adolescence is a term used to describe the period between childhood and adulthood, a sort of 'no man's land'. Geldard, Geldard and Foo (2019) explain that adolescence is a period in a young person's life when they transition from parental dependence to autonomy, independence and maturity. Children in their adolescence are mostly unclear about their roles, identity and purpose. Their brain is in a surge of rapid development and rewiring which makes them very unpredictable in emotions and behaviours (Vassar, 2019). During adolescence, peer influence is also a significant socialisation factor. Notwithstanding this expanded sphere of influence, research has shown that parenting is responsible for more variance in maladaptive adolescent behaviour than any other factor (Hoskins, 2014; Pinquart, 2017; Richaud, Mesurado & Lemos, 2013). Understanding the necessity of maintaining high-quality parenting is especially important during the adolescent years, which may be challenging for both parents and their adolescent children.

Relating to the context of this study, previous findings have shown that parents in resource-constrained societies are significantly more likely than more affluent parents to face a variety of problems, in addition to material hardship, that may impair their parenting (Katz, Corlyon, La Placa & Hunter, 2007). According to Mesurado *et al.* (2014), these difficulties include low levels of parental education, a lack of access to work opportunities, isolation, physical and mental health issues, and domestic abuse. Thus, parents living in resource-constrained communities, which are characterised by poverty in particular, are less likely to be able to provide ideal living conditions for their children and are more likely to employ forceful and harsh parenting approaches (Hyde *et al.*, 2020). The disruption of parenting has been identified as one of the ways in which poverty affects children (Wadsworth, Raviv, Santiago & Etter, 2011). The pioneering work of Elder, Nguyen and Caspi (1985), which documented the impact of financial stress on the psychological functioning of families in poor communities, particularly children, during the Great Depression is crucial to this study. According to the research by Elder *et al.* (1985), economic hardship has a harmful impact on children by

disrupting parenting and other family processes. Financial loss was linked to increased irritability, explosive behaviour and sadness in parents, which was then linked to harsher and more arbitrary parenting techniques. The children studied had to cope with more behavioural and socio-emotional issues as a result of the disruptions in parenting (Elder *et al.*, 1985). Oldfield, Stevenson and Haley (2018) posit that, if subjected to inappropriate parenting, adolescents may develop maladaptive individual behaviours that have detrimental effects on the social functioning of the community. Therefore, it seems essential for this study to focus on resource-constrained communities which are to a greater extent marred with impediments to the effective parenting of adolescent children in South Africa. The main purpose of this paper is therefore, to explore the barriers to effective parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained communities.

Parenting approaches adopted in raising children are understood as contributing to the parent-child relationship and developmental outcomes in children, which can either prevent or contribute to substance abuse, deviant behaviour, depression, misconduct or delinquency, mental health issues, and health behaviours such as premarital sexual practices (Cluver *et al.*, 2017; Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). Parenting approaches used across the different developmental ages and stages play a crucial role in the lives of adolescents. The parenting approaches can be explained through two dimensions of parenting, namely (i) acceptance and responsiveness, and (ii) excessive demanding and control (Gralewski & Jankowska, 2020). Parental acceptance and warmth can be defined as a parent that intentionally fosters individuality, regulation of self and instilling empowerment in their children by being attuned to, supportive of, and responding to the needs of their children (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). Parental demanding and control refers to the excessive demands from parents to prevent the child from having a say in what he or she is doing, formulate numerous prohibitions and warrants without considering the child's feelings, do not tolerate opposition from the child if they are not fulfilling the parent's expectations, punish the child frequently, and only accept the child's plans and actions if they are in accordance with his or her own. (Gralewski & Jankowska, 2020). Effective parenting and parental involvement remain critical to the adolescents' sense of belonging or cohesion, their interaction with society, their ability to form bonds and good relationships, and their emotional and physical safety (Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015; Roman, van Heerden, Davids & Adonis, 2021). As adolescents navigate through life, identifying who they are and the role they play in society, parents continue to contribute significantly to the lives of adolescents.

Several previously identified and mentioned barriers influence parents' ability to parent their children effectively. These include but are not limited to socio-economic status, education levels, family structure, lack of knowledge and access to knowledge, parent/caregiver mental health, parental stress, and exposure to violence (Sherr *et al.*, 2017; Steele *et al.*, 2016; Ward *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, it has also been reported that parental stress increases the likelihood of child maltreatment as well as less responsive and less stimulating parent-child relationships (Steele *et al.*, 2016). Family structure also plays a significant role in families' ability to adequately care for their children as it has been reported that "single parenting increases the risk for poor behavioural and educational outcomes in young people because single parents are

more likely to be living in poverty and more likely to be stressed” (Steele *et al.*, 2016: 69). This indicates that parents' ability to effectively parent their children may be influenced by an interplay of various factors and have adverse impacts on child development and outcomes. Sherr *et al.* (2017) conducted a cross-sectional study on parenting and child outcomes in South Africa and Malawi among a sample of 989 children aged 4-13 years old. These researchers found that living in low socio-economic status areas predicted lower parenting scores, in turn signalling that poverty challenges parenting competence. They also found that being a biological parent and having good mental health was associated with higher parenting scores. Thus, effective parenting – for example, spending time with children and the parent-child relationship consisting of good communication and healthy interaction – is more likely to occur if parents have financial stability and are present in the lives of their children.

Another factor associated with barriers to effective parenting is parenting practices. Tajima, Herrenkohl, Moylan and Derr (2011) reported that adolescents who were exposed to intimate partner violence between caregivers were more likely to run away from home if their primary caregiver's parenting practices consisted of less accepting and responsive parenting. They also stated that adolescents reporting lower parental acceptance had higher predicted rates of teenage pregnancy as opposed to their counterparts whose primary caregivers illustrated higher levels of accepting parenting (Tajima *et al.*, 2011). This then has implications for the life trajectory of adolescents who are not only exposed to violence, but who do not receive the necessary support from their parents/primary caregivers. For instance, Romero, Hall, Cluver and Meinck (2018) investigated the potential for supportive parenting to protect against school delay among South African adolescents (aged 10-18 years old) who are exposed to violence. The researchers measured five parenting factors specifically: supportive parenting, consistent discipline, good monitoring, parental involvement and parent social support; they found that supportive parenting and consistent discipline act as a buffer between exposure to violence and school delay. For example, adolescents who are exposed to violence (whether in the home or the community) are less likely to struggle in school or be kept a grade behind if their parents are more supportive and consistent in discipline. This thus indicates that parents continue to play a significantly important role in their adolescent children's lives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to learn about the respondents' worlds through their perceptions and interpretations. Data were collected in five resource-constrained communities in the Western Cape province in South Africa; Saldanha, Khayelitsha, Genadendal, Caledon and Mitchells Plain. Participants in this study consisted of parents/caregivers with one or more adolescent children aged between 13 and 17 years who agreed to share their views and understanding of the barriers they were facing in parenting adolescent children in their respective communities. The study's participants were chosen through purposeful sampling. A total of 39 parents/caregivers (8 from Saldanha; 7 from Khayelitsha; 7 from Genadendal; 9 from Caledon and 8 from Mitchells Plain) participated in the interviews. Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Participants' demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristic		Frequency
Gender	Male	17
	Female	22
Age	25 -35 years	4
	36 -46 years	17
	47+ years	18
Employment status	Employed	15
	Unemployed	24
Location	Saldanha	8
	Khayelitsha	7
	Genadendal	7
	Caledon	9
	Mitchells Plain	8
Total		39

To gather data from the parents/caregivers, the researchers used open-ended semi-structured interviews. The researchers devised an interview schedule ahead of time to guide the interviews. The interviews also contained probing questions for those who had difficulty communicating their thoughts to the interviewers. The interviews were conducted in English, IsiXhosa and Afrikaans, the three most common languages spoken in the selected localities, and lasted 15 to 40 minutes. Approval to perform the study was granted by the Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape (HS20/10/52).

Parents/caregivers were recruited through community-based organisations and by researchers going door-to-door, explaining the purpose and the process of the research, and asking parents/caregivers with adolescents between the age of 13 and 17 years to participate. Participants were fully informed about the research topic, the study's benefits, the method and manner in which data was to be collected, and how anonymity would be ensured. After that, participants were given the option to ask questions and were asked to sign a consent form indicating their interest in participating before the interviews began. Anonymity was preserved by giving each participant a pseudonym that masked their personal information.

The data were then analysed inductively using thematic analysis after the digital recordings had been transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service (Neale, 2016). Since the interviews were also held in Afrikaans and Xhosa, the transcripts were meticulously translated into English before the data analysis was carried out. The initialisation step of the analysis method (see Table 2) comprised the researchers familiarising themselves with the data by reading and rereading the transcripts in order to deduce meaning, and then producing preliminary codes. Coding minimises the amount of raw data to keep it relevant to what is related to the research inquiry; it also divides the data into manageable components and guides researchers through the process of transforming raw data (Neale, 2016). Writing reflective notes constituted the final stage of the initialisation phase; this is a procedure that allowed researchers to remain true to participants' perspectives while improving the validity of theme development. Themes were generated when the coding was completed by categorising distinct

codes into linked groups. The themes were then labelled and described in order to make sense of the primary ideas that emerged. Following that, all the defined themes were verified with reference to the original transcript to ensure that the text supported the classification. After that, the final analysis and writing up of the findings took place. The last phase required a comprehensive written commentary discussing and connecting various themes to comments from participants. The study's main aim was also addressed during the finalisation phase.

Table 2: Summary of phases and stages of theme development used in the study

Phases	Stages
Initialisation	Reading and re-reading transcriptions and establishing meaning; coding; reflective notes
Generation	Categorising; comparison; terming and defining
Verification	Checking themes against original transcripts
Finalisation	Final analysis and writing up of findings

Source: Adapted from Donga, Roman, Adebisi, Omukunyi, and Chinyakata (2021)

FINDINGS

Six themes emanated from the data as major barriers to effective parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained communities. The first relates to financial constraints, which affects parental capacity to provide for the basic and material needs of adolescents. The second theme focuses on the negative impact of peer influence on parenting, whilst the third theme centres on parents' concerns about alcohol and drug abuse among adolescents. Fourth is the lack of adequate parenting time, which has a negative impact on the quality of care and support for adolescents. The fifth theme was poor communication, which acts as a major barrier to effective parenting of adolescent children. The final theme describes the effects of maturational changes on adolescents' behaviour and attitude towards their parents or caregivers. These themes are presented below along with illustrative quotes from the participants.

Financial Constraints

Ward *et al.* (2015) state that many parents in South African low-income communities face considerable financial constraints in their efforts to fulfil the tasks of parenting. This in turn increases the burden that parents experience when trying to provide care and support for their children. Participants discussed their hurdles in parenting with a lack of adequate finances as follows:

There are many times when children want phones or a pair of tekkies [sneakers]... Young boys want to dress to impress because they want to be admired by the opposite gender. So, if the finances are not there, then it can hinder the children. So, that is a yes 100%, finances play a big role. (49-year-old male, with a 13-year-old child)

The most difficult part? Every month when I get paid and then I don't have money to spoil them like once a month (smiles) but otherwise I try my best to give them everything. (50-year-old female, with a 14-year-old child)

From these comments it is evident that, during adolescence, children tend to value material items mostly to maintain an acceptable image amongst their peers. In addition to this,

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participants represented themselves as struggling economically, and constructed their position as one where there was a persistent battle with finances. Apart from the need to provide children with material items, some participants revealed that, they often lacked the capacity and finances to adequately provide the basic home needs such as food, water and electricity. They also described how they were underpaid as well as facing challenges with employment opportunities.

Like uhmm, food is expensive, paying your rent, buying electricity, your water bills coming in high and you are trying to make ends meet, man it is tough but you must cope and survive. (49-year-old female, with a 13-year-old child)

The only stumbling block for me is that the father works, he comes here with little money and then I must sit and worry 'what am I going to do now?' There might be something to eat tonight, but tomorrow morning I ask myself 'what are the kids going to eat?'. (44-year-old female, with a 14-year-old child)

The farmers don't want to give us work, but then how do I provide for my children?... the father comes with a R400 but now I have to break my head thinking 'how am I going to buy food and the children need this and that?' Yes, finance is the biggest problem. (31-year-old female, with a 15-year-old child)

Peer Influence

Peer influence was considered by most parents/caregivers to be a significant barrier to effective parenting of adolescent children. The adolescent brain, as described by Albert, Chein and Steinberg (2013), places great emphasis on the opinions of their peer groups so that they can feel a sense of belonging in those groups. As such, adolescents might want to do things to please their peers, even if parents are against it. Some participants even said that the thought of their children getting involved with wrong friends as scary and worrying. This is evident from the following statements by the participants:

I think every parent's challenge starts when their children become teenagers and they need to be guided and protected and also be given a strong foundation in order to stand firm in their beliefs so they won't be misguided by the wrong people. (60-year-old male, with a 15-year-old child)

It is her first year in high school, you know, and I don't know how she is going to be next year or the year after that, you know, how friends influence children, that is a worry because I am scared that might happen. (49-year-old female, with a 13-year-old child)

And sometimes it is very difficult for me to support him, because he only listens when he wants to and, uhmm, the friends he moves with and so forth. (34-year-old female, with a 14-year-old child)

The difficulty of being a parent is that you are scared something might happen to your child, that they are going to be influenced by wrong friends like 'come we do this and that and don't tell your parents'. (49-year-old male, with a 17-year-old child)

The desire by adolescents to fit in and be accepted into a wrong peer group can lead to misconduct. For instance, one participant revealed how peer influence resulted in the prevalence of substance abuse among teenagers in their community.

All this is linked to the so-called bad companions ... they influence each other in this area and now it is so hard to control them as they are always operating under the influence of drugs and alcohol. (50-year-old male, with a 17-year-old child)

As mentioned earlier, the issue of alcohol and drug abuse was also established as a major theme from the data analysed and this is reported in detail next.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcohol and drug abuse by adolescents is a major public health concern in South Africa. Most participants reported high levels of alcohol and drug abuse among adolescents in their communities. They specifically described how concerning and difficult it was to raise children under such circumstances. Some participants had the following to say with regards to alcohol and drug abuse among adolescents:

Sometimes adolescents consider abusing alcohol and drugs, they smoke at this very early age, which is why we wonder what these youngsters would do once they grow old. (39-year-old female, with a 16-year-old child)

Friends can influence you so quickly and say 'come, take a drug or cigarette or the slow boat (marijuana) or come home with me' and I don't like that, I told her already. (43-year-old male, with a 15-year-old child)

Especially now, it is very difficult raising children because all kinds of things are happening, all kinds of drugs are out. (49-year-old female, with a 13-year-old child)

Sentiments shared by participants also show that, adolescents who live in poor communities are highly vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse as a result economic hardship. One parent shared her sentiment as follows:

Uhhh its very difficult, this area doesn't have job opportunities and these children are so much exposed to hard drugs... they lack the resources and opportunities to live a clean and sober life. (52-year-old male, with a 17-year-old child)

Lack of Adequate Parental Time

Lack of adequate parental time was also indicated by some participants as a barrier to effective parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained communities. Some of the parents attributed this to their busy schedules as they are mostly grappling with the pressure of looking for some money to use for their families. They seemed to agree, however, that parents must be more present and be less neglectful of their children as that makes emotionally distant parenting more likely. The excerpts shown below illustrate this:

It's a challenge that you are not always there for your child... That you may not provide enough support, you are maybe not always available to lend an ear... You

are busy with work and the house... Everything plays a role. (44-year-old female, with a 15-year-old child)

You know we are living in an environment which is poor and I am always hustling, it becomes difficult to spend time with them and observe their growth. (47-year-old female, with a 15-year-old child)

Only for being there and if you find out you have a teenage pregnancy in your family it is like you failed as a mother or you failed as a parent because you weren't there at all times. (39-year-old female, with a 16-year-old-child)

Communication

Effective communication with adolescents is described as one of the foundations of good parenting. As children become adolescents, they normally get more involved with peers and talk less to parents, a situation that sometimes causes conflict and misunderstanding in the parent-adolescent relationship. One participant revealed how communication with her child changed as she grew older. Another participant also expressed her concern about some children's behaviour which she linked to possible communication challenges. This is aptly illustrated by the responses below:

I would like my kids to be honest with me and be open because my other child was open with me before but now she's not so open. (37-year-old male, with a 15-year-old child)

I don't know if it's due to failing to communicate properly or what? Some kids don't listen at all ... it is really difficult being a parent sometimes. (45-year-old male, with a 16-year-old child)

Moreover, another single parent appeared to lack the time to talk properly with his children mainly because of work commitments. This indicates the absence of effective communication in his relationship with his children.

Honestly, I am finding it difficult to have open conversations with my children because I always arrive home from work late and tired. What worries me most is that I am a single parent. (52-year-old male, with a 17-year-old child)

Maturation Changes

Participants also identified the difficulty of dealing with the maturation of adolescents as a barrier to parenting. Common among the responses was the issue of a visible change in the attitude of adolescents as they develop and grow. The participants revealed the following:

Like, now, this is what I am experiencing currently, I am just being honest ... he just has a will of his own and uhmm, the phase he is going through right now, is like too much for me. And sometimes it is very difficult for me to support him, because he only listens when he wants to. (34-year-old female, with a 14-year-old child)

You must worry when they start high school nowadays, their attitude changes immediately ... You can see the attitude is different, man, and it's like, 'I'm a little big

now man', but I bring them down back to their level (laughs). (49-year-old female, with a 13-year-old child)

It's becoming increasingly tough to keep her under control. She never responds to you and occasionally disobeys every rule you set for her. (42-year-old male, with a 15-year-old child)

DISCUSSION

As the adolescent child goes through the developmental changes, parents need to adapt their parenting style and approach (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Svetaz, Garcia-Huidobro and Allen (2014) point out that this is a challenging moment for both parents and teenagers, and it is critical to continue high-quality parenting practices and care relationships during the adolescent development phases. There are many factors that have a positive or negative influence on parenting styles. As previously mentioned, the following are some of the factors that have an influence on parenting practices: family structure; low parental education levels; low socioeconomic status; exposure to violence within the community; lack of knowledge and access to knowledge; parent/caregiver mental health and parental stress; lack of access to jobs; and financial constraints (Dewi, Jittanoon & Wiroonpanich, 2021; Mesurado *et al.*, 2014; Sherr *et al.*, 2017; Steele *et al.*, 2016). These factors contribute toward parenting styles, which is either accepting and warmth, or demanding and controlling. The current research effort took into account the low socioeconomic status of parents living in resource-constrained communities of South Africa's Western Cape province in order to explore the barriers to effective parenting of their adolescent children.

From the results of the study, most parents/caregivers stated that financial constraints as a result of poverty played a role in their ability to parent their adolescents effectively. In a survey of poor parents in Providence, the densely populated capital city of the US state of Rhode Island, respondents described conditions of need and deprivation linked to financial constraints, including domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness as contributing to abusive or neglectful parenting practices (Fong, 2017). A study conducted in Sweden by Hjalmarsson (2018) mentions that parents who live in poverty are considerably more likely than more affluent parents to be dealing with a variety of challenges that may impair their parenting. This often results in material deprivation for adolescent children as well as parents' incapacity to support children's educational development, which in turn affect adolescents' mental and physical health as well as leading to an increase in risk behaviours affecting their performance in school and/or employment (Yoshikawa, Aber & Beardslee, 2012). The study also found that as a consequence of the lack of financial resources, parents do not always have adequate time to parent their children as they are required to take up sometimes multiple menial jobs and work longer hours daily to make ends meet in order to provide for their families. This increases the risk of poor mental health as well as problematic behavioural outcomes for adolescent children, as parents are likely to be mostly stressed and struggling with effective parenting (Huang, Costeines, Kaufman & Ayala, 2014; Mao *et al.*, 2022; Ward *et al.*, 2015).

Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory proposed that as part of adolescent psychological and physiological development, adolescents are exploring their identities and in some cases feel more inclined to spend time with and follow their friends' advice (Psychology Notes Headquarters, 2022). This becomes problematic if the friends are considered to exert a negative influence in their lives. Evidence from the study participants established peer influence as one of the driving forces that have a negative influence on the parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained communities. The overwhelming majority of the parents interviewed agreed that the majority of peer influence in their communities likely led to delinquent behaviour – a situation that renders effective parenting of adolescents challenging. Investigating the impact of deviant peer influence on teenage delinquency, Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion and McCord (2005:11) advance that “keeping company with deviant peers significantly increases the likelihood of individual delinquency for at least some kinds of adolescents”. Deviant peer influence is a major concern in South Africa, as the recent South African survey on adolescent risk behaviours established that, as a result of peer influence, adolescents begin drinking before the age of 13 years, and boys are more likely than girls to use alcohol, binge drink, and drive or walk while under the influence of drugs (Khuzwayo, Taylor & Connolly, 2020). Consistent with this finding, the study participants also relayed their concerns pertaining to adolescents' alcohol and drug abuse within their communities.

Harrison, Loxton and Somhlaba (2021) state that, as there is a deep desire among adolescents to be accepted and to experience a sense of belonging, they are more prone to imitate dangerous behaviour, such as drug and alcohol misuse. In most South African low-income communities, this situation is exacerbated by factors such as poverty and joblessness, as well as a lack of leisure opportunities, which leave young people feeling bleak and useless. If they do not see themselves ever getting a decent job with enough money to live a normal life, seeking oblivion through alcohol and drug abuse becomes a tempting escape route (van Zyl, 2013). For most adolescents in poor communities, when they cannot resolve social problems meaningfully, they become convinced of their worthlessness and this may lead to social withdrawal from those with whom they have been relating closely, such as their parents or caregivers. Mamman, Othman and Lian (2014) argued that parents, particularly in poor communities, also contribute to their children's alcohol and drug abuse as most of them are also dependent on or abuse alcohol or illicit drugs as a way of dealing with social pressures. Johnson (2015) also posits that parental substance misuse can cause them to become less responsive and friendly, as well as more authoritarian and punitive toward their adolescent children, resulting in an inability to practise their parenting skills effectively.

In line with much of the literature on parent-adolescent relationships (Branje, de Moor, Spitzer & Becht, 2021; Branje, Laursen & Collins, 2012; Laursen, Coy & Collins, 2017), results from our sample showed increased parental challenges associated with adolescents' maturational changes. Arain *et al.* (2013) aver that both parents and adolescents may not have enough time to adjust when adolescents begin to display maturational changes (physical, cognitive, emotional, etc.). As such conflict often increases between parents and adolescents, while warmth or closeness decreases - particularly during early adolescence. However, Marceau, *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 2022: 58(4)

Ram and Susman (2015) argue that these general developmental trajectories of maturational change are not always the same and may not sufficiently characterise parent-child relationships during adolescence in different circumstances. For example, research on the biology of stress demonstrates how substantial adversity, such as extreme hardships that are common in low-income areas, can permanently activate the body's stress response in adolescents, change the brain's circuits and, ultimately, the timing and trajectory of maturity (Sun, 2017). As a result, adolescents may be more vulnerable to the risks and challenges associated with early pubertal maturation, such as increased risk of mental health issues, poor self-image and self-concept, increased risk-taking behaviours, behavioural disorders and a negative parent-child relationship (Rudolph & Troop-Gordon, 2010).

As far as we know, ours is the first known study to holistically explore the barriers to effective parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained communities within the South African context. In effect, the study attempts to expand a growing area of research tailored towards addressing the obstacles that parents grapple with most in vulnerable South African communities, particularly with respect to the wellbeing and moral development of adolescent children. Findings from the study are also envisaged to maximise the developmental trajectories of South African adolescents living in low-income communities, enhance their ability to persevere in the face of adversity as well as foster optimal parental-adolescent relationships. Furthermore, in South Africa policies specifically aimed at changing high-risk settings such as low-income communities into ones that encourage adolescent development have been largely overlooked. This means that the study could potentially aid policymakers in developing appropriate strategies to enable and empower parents and community residents to nurture adolescent children more effectively.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

When interpreting the findings of this study, some limitations should be taken into account. It is worth noting, for example, that the sampling procedure used (purposive) may have impeded the selection of a really representative sample of the population. Furthermore, only the general parents' perspectives were considered for analysis and yet, according to recent studies, parents' and adolescents' opinions on parenting frequently diverge during the course of adolescent development, according to Mastrotheodoros, van der Graaff, Deković, Meeus and Branje (2019). These authors also argue that parenting approaches towards adolescent children may differ because mothers' parenting is considered to be more consistent than fathers' parenting, because it is less affected by contextual variables, partly because the maternal role is considered to be more socially prescribed than the paternal role. This implies that a future longitudinal study is required to holistically investigate the study phenomenon, using different perspectives on challenges to parenting of adolescents in resource-constrained communities from both the maternal and paternal perspective, as well as taking into account adolescents' sentiments on the parenting techniques of both mothers and fathers. As the Western Cape's population is very diverse in terms of ethnicity, in the future ethnic differences between adolescent-parent relationships should be investigated in larger samples with participants evenly distributed across ethnic groups. Finally, despite a large amount of evidence linking poverty to unfavourable outcomes, there is also compelling evidence that parents who

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live in poverty are incredibly resilient and have strong coping abilities in the face of adversity (Anderson, 2018). This implies that future research should not only delve into the hindrances to parenting, but also focus on the coping skills in the parenting of adolescent children in the face of the various adversities that characterise in low-income communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) bio-ecological perspective, several recommendations can be made on the basis of the results of the study that would greatly enhance interventions geared toward improving adolescent development and parenting strategies in low-income communities. Firstly, the development of caring and loving microsystems in families is critical. Swick and Williams (2006) pointed out that caring, loving family relationships can serve as a foundation for parents and adolescent children to form connections that permit them to become more responsive in the face of adversity such as poverty. Despite the reported limited time that parents spend with their children because of social pressures, it is important for them to initiate interactive activities particularly with their adolescent children during their free time or simply having long conversations to make the most of the limited time they have together. Showing an interest in things that they are passionate about is another great way to show affection towards adolescents. In addition, to improve parent-adolescent communication it is important for parents to inculcate a culture of openness and to listen effectively. If adolescents feel listened to without too much interjection or criticism, they are more likely to open to their parents whenever they feel vulnerable. To enhance effective communication particularly when children are faced with problems, parents should also act as coaches to their adolescent children, reviewing events, identifying problem sources and discussing solutions to avoid future problems. Similarly, parents should learn to guide their children in expressing, sharing and regulating a spectrum of positive and negative emotions as they mature. Furthermore, they need to show concern and care, while being flexible and allowing the adolescents space and time to be aware of and navigate this developmental phase.

In order to improve the parenting of adolescents in resource-constrained communities more effectively, the study advises aiding families to become more empowered in their exosystem relationships. Bronfenbrenner (1979) points out that the exosystem involves relationships outside of the microsystem's close, intimate relationships that can influence a child's development. It is hence important for parents from low-income communities to participate in parental workshops that help them deepen their connection with their adolescent children and foster self-love, responsibility and resilience. Parental workshops also help parents to deal with their adolescents' maturational change-associated behaviours, as workshops are thought to be beneficial for parents to keep up with the most recent research in adolescent child's psychology and developmental neuroscience (Singhal, 2022).

To tackle the challenge of alcohol and drug abuse amongst adolescent children in resource-constrained communities, the study further recommends nurturing in ways families can use mesosystems to help them better respond to these challenges. A mesosystem refers to interrelations or connections between two or more microsystems that affect an individual's

behaviour, such as school and family, community and family, church and family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Schools, for example, would be a reasonable starting place for combating alcohol and drug misuse among South African teenagers, since they may trigger a change in peer pressure and parental behaviour, hence reducing the likelihood of alcohol and drug abuse. Schools can make a difference since there are always students and teachers who could speak out against alcohol and drug misuse. Selected parents, learners, teachers and key leaders in communities could construct appropriate parent-participation initiatives, including parent training programmes in terms of alcohol and drug abuse, in order to establish a network that could address the problem.

According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), outside influences that do not include a relationship with the adolescents, can also have a direct impact on their development and upbringing. On the basis of this assumption, the study proposes that within the macrosystem contexts where vulnerable families dwell, better family financial support techniques and policies need to be lobbied for and implemented. A macrosystem refers to the broader social environment that influences individuals' behaviour such as the wider culture, economic circumstances, the law and public policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Consequently, to bring financial relief to South African low-income communities, government initiatives are required to meet the goal of creating 11 million jobs and tripling economic growth by 2030 (World Bank, 2017). Additionally, the government could provide targeted small loans (micro-credit schemes) to underprivileged families, allowing them to start their own businesses. Macroeconomic policies must also stimulate the flow of resources to vulnerable communities in order to improve their access to productive resources such as land, credit and accommodation. With sufficient economic assets in the country, the stress faced by most parents in low-income communities could be minimised, which would be one way to enhance the effective parenting of adolescent children. In dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, at the macrosystem context, drug pushers, illicit suppliers of tobacco and alcohol, as well as legal suppliers who breach the prescribed trading hours and minimum age of their customers should be identified and prosecuted.

CONCLUSION

In this study we aimed to explore the barriers to effective parenting of adolescent children in resource-constrained communities. It is known that the adolescent developmental age and stage come with many physical, emotional, mental and social pressures and changes to which the adolescents and parents need to adapt. However, as evident from the sentiments shared by the study participants, socio-economic status has been found to greatly influence the way parents perform their parental duties. Specifically, the results of the study revealed various factors that hinder effective parenting of adolescents in low-income communities. These include financial constraints, peer influence, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of adequate parental time, poor communication and maturational changes. Effective parenting during this phase can therefore maximise adolescents' developmental trajectories, increase their capacity for resilience in the face of distress, and have long-term benefits on a variety of health and educational outcomes. Finally, it should be understood that the task of assisting parents in achieving positive results for their adolescent children is an issue that should be addressed by all sectors of the society:

public departments, the commercial sector, non-governmental organisations, as well as parents and adolescents themselves.

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