COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON SEX OFFENDERS' REINTEGRATION INTO THE COMMUNITY

by

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DECLARATION

I, Bulela Ntlahla (student no: 45909075), declare that ***Community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community*** is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination at any other institution for any purposes. I also declare without prejudice that all the sources that I utilised or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of an exhaustive list.

BULELA NTLAHLA

2026/01/20

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my late parents Gladstone Welani Ignitius Ntlahla and Tembeka Tryphaena “Bella” Mtshazi-Ntlahla, of blessed memory, who embraced their responsibilities with faith and integrity and whose sacrifices granted me the invaluable opportunity to pursue education. I genuinely think that I would not be who I am now if it weren't for you two. You both helped shape who I am today. I will never forget your comment, "Save every cent and pursue your studies, you are capable," even if they sounded cynical at the time. Father, even though you were called to glory before I began this trip, you gave me an identity. Mother, I will always treasure your unwavering love, fortitude, and resiliency. Your perseverance kept me going even though you were summoned to glory in the middle of my studies.

This study is dedicated in remembrance and profound gratitude for your dreams and aspirations for me, and for the commitment you demonstrated in every step that contributed to this achievement. Your inspiration continues to guide me in diverse ways, even in your absence.

I further dedicate this work to my siblings, whose steadfast presence and support have sustained me through both challenges and triumphs. Finally, to the Ntlahla and Mtshazi families, whose unwavering encouragement and support have been invaluable throughout this journey, I extend my deepest appreciation.

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I attribute all glory to God Almighty for His unconditional love, grace, mercy, and favour bestowed upon me. “I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism” (Acts 10:34). “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

You are the source of my strength and my fortunate assurance, for which I am thankful. Your presence has kept me going through every obstacle, and Your direction has carried me through every victory. This effort is evidence of the strength you offer and the unwavering assurance.

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ABSTRACT

Sexual offences are one of the major criminal offences that affect communities globally. They affect not only the victims' families but also the community at large. After serving a prison sentence, sex offenders are reintegrated back into the same communities from which they came. Government encourages communities to give offenders a second chance and to provide the support they need. The aim of this study was to explore the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community.

The theoretical framework used in this study was the ecological systems approach. In employing the qualitative research approach an interpretivism paradigm was used. This encompassed explorative, descriptive and contextual designs to explore, describe and contextualise the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community. The research population consisted of community members based in Mamelodi Township, Pretoria. The sample of participants was selected in utilising purposive sampling. Semi structured interviews, guided by an interview guide with open-ended questions, were used to collect the data. The data were analysed using Tesch's steps. The verification of data was conducted using Guba and Lincoln's model and the four aspects of trustworthiness identified by them were applied. In conducting the research, the researcher adhered to the ethical considerations outlined by the University. The study adds to existing discussions on community perspectives regarding sex offender reintegration within the South African context.

The findings revealed that community views on the reintegration of sex offenders are mixed, emotional, fearful, and stigmatised. Although some recognised that offenders deserve rehabilitation and second chances, concerns were raised about community safety, lack of information, and insufficient support for successful reintegration. The study also revealed that social workers play a critical role in mediating between offenders, victims, and communities by providing education, psychosocial support, and community

meetings, highlighting the importance of enhancing community-based interventions and collaborative reintegration efforts.

Key words: Community, Perspectives, Sex Offender, Reintegration, Rehabilitation Social Worker, Risk prediction, Sex offender accountability, Harmfulness perceptions, Community-based Sex offender management, Social work interventions, Stigma, Recidivism

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APA	**AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**
ATSA	**ASSOCIATION FOR THE TREATMENT OF SEXUAL ABUSERS**
BERA	**BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**
CATSO	**CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR TREATMENT OF SEXUAL OFFENDERS**
CAR	**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**
CBT	**COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY**
CD	**CORRECTIONAL DEPARTMENT**
CDS	**COMMUNITY ALCOHOL AND DRUG SERVICES**
COSA	**CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**
COVID-19	**CORONA VIRUS DISEASE OF 2019**
CSA	**CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**
DBE	**DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION**
DCS	**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES**
DOJ	**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**
DSD	**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**
EST	**ECOLOGY SYSTEME THEORY**
FCS	**FAMILY VIOLENCE CHILD PROTECTION AND SEXUAL OFFENCES**
UNITS	**UNIVERSAL NETWORK INTELLIGENCE TRACKING SYSTEM**
GBVF	**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND FEMICIDE**
HIV	**HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS**
IAP	**INTENSIVE AFTER-CARE PROGRAMME**
ICC	**INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT**
ICR	**INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS**
IOM	**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION**
ICCPR	**INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS**
JCPS	**JUSTICE CRIME PREVENTION AND SECURITY**
MAPPS	**ADOLESCENT PROGRAMME FOR POSITIVE SEXUALITY**

MS	**MICROSOFT**
NASWA	**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN AFRICA**
NICRO	**NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CRIME PREVENTION AND SUPPORTING OFFENDERS**
NGO	**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION**
NPA	**NATIONAL PROSECUTING AUTHORITY**
NPF	**NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK**
RNR	**RISK NEED RESPONSIVITY**
PEP	**POST EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS**
PIE	**PERSON-IN-ENVIRONMENT**
PGI	**PROSECUTOR GUIDED INVESTIGATORS**
REC	**RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**
RJ	**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**
SACSSP	**SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONS**
SAHO	**SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY ONLINE**
SALGA	**SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION**
SAPS	**SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICES**
SBE	**SMALL BUSINESS ENTERPRISE**
SES	**SOCIOECONOMIC SEX STATUS**
SOCS	**SEXUAL OFFENCES COURTS**
REC: SBE EDUCATION	**RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE: SOCIAL BEHAVIOURAL**
RSA	**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**
STI	**SEXUAL TRANSMITTED INFECTION**
SVORI	**SERIOUS AND VIOLENT OFFENDER RE-ENTRY INITIATIVE**
TCCS	**THUTHUZELA CARE CENTRES**
UNODC	**UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME**
UN	**UNITED NATIONS**
UNSCR	**UNITED NATION SECURITY COUNCIL**
WHO	**WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION**

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a general orientation to the study on community perspectives regarding the reintegration of sex offenders into society. It outlines the South African context of sexual violence, the challenges associated with the rehabilitation and reintegration of sex offenders, and the role of communities in this process. Community resistance, fear, and stigma are recognised as posing major barriers to successful reintegration and may influence post-release adjustment. The chapter discusses the significance of social workers in this process, frames the research problem, and identifies the rationale, goals, and objectives that guide the study. Key terms are clarified to ensure conceptual consistency, and the structure of the research report is outlined to provide a roadmap for the reader.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Violence against women and children is repeatedly reported in South African and international media. Sexual offences and murder as crimes against women accounted for approximately 4.6% of reported crimes in 2019 in the United Kingdom, according to police statistics (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019). Sexual offence data is perceived as being underreported, largely due to the sensitive the nature of these crimes. According to South Africa's Crime Statistics, Gauteng province recorded the highest number of rape cases, with more than 8 417 incidences followed by KwaZulu Natal (7 667) and Eastern Cape (7 304) (South African Police Service, 2019).

Between 1998 and 2008, sexual violence against men was identified in reports from 25 conflict-affected countries. Subsequent reports emerged from regions such as Libya, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic (CAR) (Dolan 2014:1). In 2013, the United Nation Security Council (UNSCR) recognised men and boys as victims of sexual violence in conflict situations through United Nations security council resolution (UNSCR) 2106 of June 2013 (UNSCR, 2013).

Integrating sex offenders back into the community is a “real-life” problem. The reintegration of sex offenders into communities presents a complex social challenge. Ex-offenders are considered as being untrustworthy and face significant obstacles in their reintegration, such as having limited access to employment, housing, financial resources, and supportive social networks (Buck, Cochran, Young, Gordon, Yuen et al., 2021). Due to limited access to finances, work opportunities, work skills/life skills, and supportive social circles, they find it hard to settle down and meet modern society's standards. Instead of building a new life and identity as law-abiding citizens in society, ex- offenders tend to face rejection and labels that make them feel like outcasts of society.

For sexual and violent offenders specifically, reintegration challenges are often intensified by heightened stigmatisation and continued difficulties in securing housing and employment (Grossi, 2017). These barriers are interconnected and often create a cumulative disadvantage, increasing the risk of social isolation and unsuccessful reintegration (Grossi, 2017; Shackley, Weiner, Day & Willis, 2014:1).

The rehabilitation of offenders extends beyond correctional centres and requires meaningful engagement with communities (Murhula & Singh, 2019:29). Murhula and Singh (2019:29) further argue that community involvement plays an important role in supporting rehabilitation and reintegration processes. The solid durable affiliation amongst the perpetrator and the community members as families of individuals, supports the chances of efficacious restoration into society. It is thus important to understand public attitudes regarding offender reintegration since they can affect how well reintegrated an offender will be in society. Public opinion can affect the level of acceptance an offender will receive when released from prison. Positive public perceptions of rehabilitation programmes are associated with increased programme effectiveness. When the public feels positive about rehabilitation programmes and policies, they are more likely to be effective (Don Caeiro, Bheemaiah, Devaseelan, Varghese, D’Souza, 2024).

South Africa is reported to have one of the highest recidivism rates (the percentage of former prisoners being rearrested) in the world (Murhula & Singh, 2019:34). Sexual

offender recidivism rates are reported to range from approximately five per cent at three years to about 24 per cent at 15 years. While sexual recidivism rates seem relatively low, there are significant differences between offender subgroups. Research has shown that different types of sexual offenders have different levels of sexual recidivism. Recidivism research focusing on rapists and child molesters found that child molesters who target boys have the highest rate of recidivism followed by rapists, child molesters who target girls and incest offenders. Because of these differences, offenders must have different policies directed at them. Female sexual offenders have lower rates of recidivism than males (Przybylski, 2015:5). Because relapse has been linked to community support upon release, it is argued that community support should be focused on.

Social workers are well-positioned to contribute towards the reintegration process as their mandate is to practice on micro-, meso- and macro-levels, plan, coordinate, implement and evaluate interventions with communities, ensure social inclusion and change behaviour. The role social work services play in the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) focus on evaluating offenders and providing need-based programmes and services aimed at improving and ensuring offenders improved social functioning, and their reintegration back into the community (Ramokolo-Kutu & Botha, 2025). Social workers practice in a correctional setting by addressing issues relating to offending behaviour and providing psychosocial support for inmates as they transition through daily living in prison and preparing them for life after being released back into the community. Social workers can also practice in non-clinical community settings by implementing programmes and strategies with families, communities, and community-based services that build social cohesion, strengthen social integration and promote collective responsibility (Parmar, 2014:307). Murhula and Singh (2019:29) have indicated that there is fragile collaboration between the DCS and communities/community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and faith-based organisations, which impacts effective therapy and restoration of offenders into communities.

Community responses to sexual offenders and sexual offending are influenced by a number of factors including the community context in South Africa as a whole. In 2019,

the President of South Africa declared violence against women a national crisis, following widespread protests (Mail & Guardian, 2019). The anger and mourning expressed during these protests may influence community resistance to reintegration efforts. However, there is little information available on how community members view and react to the reintegration of sexual offenders in general and within South Africa specifically. Although some studies have explored offender reintegration broadly, limited South African research has specifically examined community perceptions regarding the reintegration of sex offenders (Zondi, 2012; Murhula & Singh, 2019). Sexual and gender-based crimes have recently been proclaimed as a priority crime in South Africa. This increased focus, publicity, government priority, and community awareness place more scrutiny on society's reaction to convicted offenders returning to their communities (South African Government, 2025).

As a result, communities may become more resistant, fearful, or unwilling to accept convicted sexual offenders returning to their communities after incarceration. Despite the important role communities play in the reintegration process, limited South African research has explored how community members perceive and respond to the reintegration of sexual offenders.

This lack of context-specific knowledge presents a challenge for social workers and other stakeholders involved in offender rehabilitation and reintegration services. Without a clearer understanding of community perceptions and responses, it may be difficult to develop effective reintegration interventions, community support strategies, and responsive social work services for sexual offenders returning to communities. Therefore, the problem statement for this study is that there is insufficient knowledge regarding how communities in South Africa perceive and respond to the reintegration of sexual offenders into communities from a social work perspective. The findings of this study may provide insight into community perspectives and assist social workers and relevant stakeholders in strengthening reintegration support and intervention strategies within South African communities.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale of a study justifies why a study should be done and how it contributes to existing knowledge. Creswell and Poth (2017:131) define rationale as “how you will explain that the topic is worth studying”. Creswell and Creswell (2018:113) further explain rationale as the researcher’s reason for choosing a particular research problem or wanting to know more about an area in which little is known or can make a valuable contribution. This means that developing a rationale for undertaking a study requires evaluating the available literature to see what is already known about the topic and what remains unclear so that the prospective researcher can justify why the study is important (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018:34).

Research regarding sexual offending abounds; however, little emphasis has been placed on how communities view the reintegration process of sexual offenders. Much of what has been written addresses offenders’ experiences of reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, policies, risk-management approaches, barriers after prison release, unemployment, and community rejection (Brown, Esbensen & Geis, 2013; McAlinden, 2016; Murhula & Singh, 2019; Russell, Seymour, & Lambie, 2014). Studies by Rao (2017) and Dworkin et al. (2017) emphasise the physical and psychological consequences endured by victims of sexual offences and serves to explain why sexual violence can cause far greater damage than other offences. This literature perpetuates why community members react negatively to or fight reintegration efforts (Rao, 2017).

Sex offenders are among the most stigmatised and socially rejected offender groups, often facing fear, mistrust, exclusion, and community resistance upon release from correctional facilities. These negative community perceptions may undermine successful reintegration, increase social isolation, and negatively affect rehabilitation outcomes. McAlinden (2016) and Zondi (2012) recognise that community acceptance is an important component of successful offender reintegration. Zondi (2012) briefly mentions community participation, but these discussions do not meaningfully unpack how community members perceive, negotiate, react to, or make sense of the reintegration of sex offenders. South African research continues to focus primarily on institutional, policy, or offender-centred perspectives on reintegration, while social work

research exploring community responses to the reintegration of sex offenders remains particularly scarce.

Sexual violence can lead to numerous short-term and long-term health problems, (McLeod & Porter, 2024). Victims also experience psychological trauma from these offences. It is noted that sexual offences can cause more harm than other crimes (Dworkin, Menon, Bystrynski & Allen, 2017). The trauma experienced by victims could affect their intimacy with others, as well as their own sexual behaviour (O'Callaghan, Shepp, Ullman, & Kirkner, 2018b). This may explain why some community members view sexual offenders with moral indignation. The literature therefore reflects a complex tension between acknowledging the severe trauma experienced by victims and promoting rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities for offenders.

A further reason for the justification of this study is the need to address a social problem. Dudovskiy (2019) asserts that research should address social problems where possible. Sexual offences in South Africa rose by 4.6 per cent between March 2018 and April 2019 (South African Police Service (SAPS), 2019). Crime statistics highlight that South Africa continues to face extraordinarily high incidents of sexual-related crimes; 53 498 sexual offences were reported to the SAPS during the period 2022/23 (South African Police Service (SAPS), 2023a). Furthermore, rape constituted 38.3 % of all crimes against children reported for the same period. Recently issued crime statistics show that a rape is reported in South Africa every 12 minutes. These high levels of sexual violence may contribute to heightened community fear and distrust towards sex offenders, which may in turn negatively influence reintegration efforts.

With this in mind, communities are likely to be sensitised about sexual offences and may respond based on the offence they perceive the individual committed. Solving or responding to community needs and critiques regarding reintegration can prevent offenders from being isolated and rejected by the very people they will be living with (Oosthuizen, Martin & De Villiers, 2024). These short- and long-term effects indicate why community responses may pose challenges for reintegrated sexual offenders.

Support from community and family members is one of the determining factors for successful reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders (Matias, Calaguas, Manalo & Dockery, & Corpuz, 2025). This suggests that reintegration outcomes may be shaped as much by social acceptance and community responses as by formal correctional or rehabilitation programmes. Should social workers want to better support reintegrated offenders as well as the communities who receive them, understanding how the latter perceive and make meaning of sexual offender reintegration will be informative.

Dudovskiy (2019) adds that another reason why this research should be conducted is that a practitioner will become a better professional by adding his or her findings to the pool of knowledge that exists on social work. By learning more about how communities perceive and make meaning of sexual offender reintegration. The study may provide contextually relevant insight into how communities perceive and make meaning of sexual offender reintegration within the South African social work context.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Research is a methodical study that seeks to address certain issues, provide answers to questions, and increase knowledge. Research offers crucial insights that influence how we perceive the world, whether it is done in science, social studies, business, or another discipline. The purpose of a study explains why the study is being conducted. It provides the overall intention or reason behind the research (Creswell & Poth, 2017:131). The purpose of this study is to explore community perspectives on the reintegration of sex offenders and to provide social work recommendations that support effective reintegration practices in South Africa.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

A research question defines the focus of the study and allows the researcher to state the problem causing interest (Maree, 2016:3). The research question guides researchers to the literature they should use, to resources that will be appropriate for their study and to decisions regarding methodologies rather than attempting to justify something they want to prove beforehand. By doing this, the research question frames the study.

In addition, a research question organises the study. Through the research question the scope of the study is determined and what will, and what will not be included is defined (Roberts-Holmes, 2018:32). By narrowing the particular area of the problem that is being researched, the researcher is able to shape a research question (Flick, 2011:84). Therefore, it is important that research questions should be narrow enough (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:71). Qualitative research usually has one research question that encompasses the main idea of the research and can be used to refocus researchers if they ever stray (Creswell, 2016:95).

For this study, the research question is: *What are the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community?*

1.6 RESEARCH GOAL

The goal is grounded in the research question and points to the desired outcome that the researcher wants to attain (Blaikie & Priest, 2019:68). The goal defines the resolution of the research (Gray, 2014:53) and has three main aims: to explore the selected research topic; to designate a topic; and to explain certain conceptions. The goal is the most significant aspect of the study and is a statement that bears the essence of an assignment (Creswell, 2016:95). The goal drives the study and guides the researcher on what the researcher would like to achieve.

The goal of this research is:

- *To develop an in-depth understanding of the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community.*
- *To proffer recommendations for social workers' support to communities in reintegration of sex offenders into the Mamelodi community.*

1.7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research objectives are strong declarations of projected conclusions that can be controlled in a certain manner, and specify the steps required to achieve the research goal (Gray, 2014:53). Research objectives usually follow the research question and

comprise statements such as: “The objectives of the study are to describe; to explore and to understand.” The recognised objectives also give a sign on what the researcher intends to conduct in an explorative, descriptive or explanatory study (Singh, 2019). They are specific, measurable, and have a completion date. Objectives can be described as steps that can be taken towards achieving a certain goal (Adeoye & Adong, 2023).

The research objectives for this study were:

- *To explore, community perspectives on the reintegration of sex offenders.*
- *To describe community perspectives on sex offenders being reintegrated into the community.*
- *To formulate recommendations for social work support to communities in facilitating reintegration.*

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODS

Figure 1-1 provides a summary of the research methods used in this study. The research approach, design, and methods depicted here are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

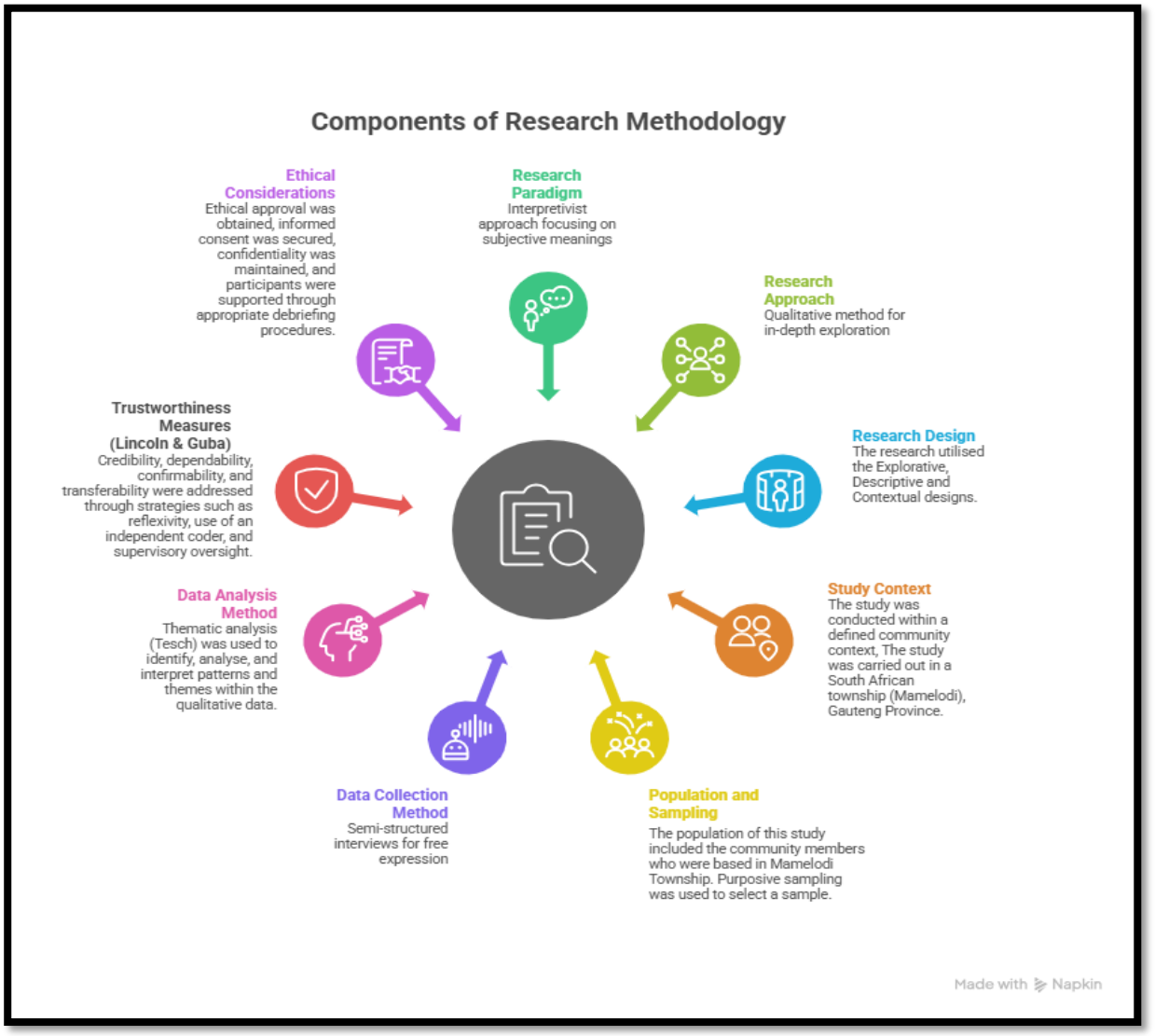

Figure 1-1 Components of the research methodology (author's own compilation, generated using Napkin AI)

1.9 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts used in this research report are clarified below: community, perspectives, sex offender, reintegration, rehabilitation and social worker.

1.9.1 Community

Community is regarded as a concrete unit of individuals with adverse symbols, such as mutual ceremonials and language, which may outline membership to the community (Cobigo & Mcheimech, 2016:194). A community is as a form of establishment where

social associations are valued for the mutual goals and development transpiring within the boundaries of decent understanding (Goodsell, Flaherty & Brown, 2014:627). Community is also demarcated as a space comprising a cluster of individuals residing in a particular area and is therefore the basis for such people to live and develop (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012:295). In this study, community refers to a group of individuals meeting the above aspects, residing in Mamelodi, Pretoria.

1.9.2 Perspectives

Perspectives refer to the representation of an individual's emotions that are his or her thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, evaluations, and the reasons the individual is thinking and/or feeling that way (Ku, Wang & Galinsky, 2015). Perspectives also refer to the unique ways in which people perceive things differently because of their uniqueness and individual experiences (Grobler & Schenck, 2009:22-23). Different views can illuminate various facets of the same subject. Perspectives function as filters; your observations, emphases, and omissions are contingent upon the lens employed.

1.9.3 Sex Offender

According to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (Republic of South Africa, 2007), a sex offender is defined as any person convicted of a sexual offence against an adult, child, or person with a mental disability, whose particulars are required to be recorded in the National Register for Sex Offenders. A sex offender is defined as an adult, individual or young person who has been condemned or pleaded guilty to committing sexually oriented offences (USLegal, 2019:1). Sexual offending is a wide-ranging classification containing various forms of rape, child molestation, demonstration, circulation and ingesting of youngster pornography on the Internet and other practices (Schmucker & Lösel, 2017: 9). Sex offender in the context of this study meant any adult, individual or young person who has been condemned or pleaded guilty to committing sexually oriented offences.

1.9.4 Reintegration

Reintegration refers to the re-entry of an ex-prisoner back into the community where he or she can rebuild a relationship with society (Gisler, Pruin & Hostettler 2018:6). Offender reintegration refers to the procedure of journeying from imprisonment into typical society. It is the process whereby an offender tries to adjust in the outside world after release from prison with the hope of being accepted in society (Chikadzi, 2017; Zondi, 2012:766). For this study, reintegration referred to the process where a sex offender re-enters the community after release from prison. Through the three-legged mandate of the National Department of Correctional Services, ensuring safe and humane incarceration, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of offenders South Africa effectively applies the Nelson Mandela Rules to its criminal justice system, Act 111 of 1998 (South Africa, 1998). This process is overseen by the DCS after the offender has served the sentence and must go back to the community.

1.9.5 Rehabilitation

In accordance with the Correctional Services Act (Act No. 111 of 1998), the Department of Correctional Services is responsible for carrying out the following goals: managing remand detainees; promoting the social responsibility and human development of all offenders and individuals under community corrections; implementing court-mandated sentences in the prescribed manner; and keeping all offenders in safe custody while maintaining their human dignity. Rehabilitation is one of the strategies and programmes used in prisons to prepare perpetrators prior to their discharge. It not only involves procedures and programmes, but it is also an umbrella term used for programmes in prison and outside prison. The main purpose is to prepare and support perpetrators on their journey of reintegration (Gisler et al., 2018:6). One of the correctional centre programmes is rehabilitation. A crucial procedure helps and enables offenders to distinguish and withdraw from the influences that tempted them to break the law. The main aim is to help the perpetrator to reconstruct and be able to reclaim a crime-free life (Murhula & Singh, 2019:22).

Sex offender rehabilitation is an effective treatment instrument in avoiding future victimisation. It differs expressively from other mental health treatments and involves association among professionals involved in sex offender management (Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) (ATSA, 2015).

1.9.6 Social worker

The designation "social worker" or "practitioner" pertains to all those registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). When making behavioural judgements, registered individuals consider this code of ethics in conjunction with the Social Service Professions Act, no 110 of 1978, which establishes the limits of social service professions in South Africa (South Africa, 1978).

According to Rahman (2020), Social workers are social justice fighters, who alleviate suffering, and enhance people's lives and communities. Enhancing human well-being is their main goal, with an emphasis on the client and their surroundings. Social workers are the only professionals that investigates societal issues, their causes, their relationships, and offer methodical solutions. Social workers assist their clients in addressing both their feelings and their options in a certain circumstance. For the purpose of this study a social worker is a registered professional as outlined in the Social Service Professions Act.

1.9.7 Risk prediction

A risk factor is defined as “a measurable characterisation of each subject in a specified population that precedes the outcome of interest, and which can be used to divide the population into two groups [the high-risk and the low-risk groups that comprise the total population]” (Kraemer et al. (1997; Arnold and Davis, 2016:417). Risk: Criminal justice interventions should be saved for offenders who pose the greatest risk, according to the risk principle. As a result, this principle offers direction about the target audience for interventions as well as the necessary level of therapy (Harkins & Beech, 2007, Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Richards, Death & McCartan, 2020:29). Sparks, cited by McAlinden, (2022:390), further described risk as a domain of sexual offending as a good example of this intricate interaction, as technocratic expert-led approaches to risk have evolved alongside and frequently despite volatile and emotional community reactions. This

indicates that community members and the victim's family can utilise past traumatic sexual offending behaviour, experience, and personal factors to estimate the likelihood of reoffending.

1.9.8 Sex offender accountability

The fundamental definition of offender accountability is "holding them to account" with the expectation that they would accept responsibility for their claimed misconduct and "calling alleged wrongdoers to account," which entails criminal charges and inquiry to (Daly, 2017; Suzuki & Wood, 2024:6). The Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act of 1994,68, which was endorsed in every state, commands that offenders provide law enforcement authorities with their identifying information so it can be kept in a central repository. It has been suggested that these registers, as part of the all-encompassing strategy for managing sexual offenders, could improve community safety by making it easier for criminal justice organisations to trace and monitor offenders (Carter, Bumby & Talbot, 2004:1295). This suggests that sex offenders must be on file with the authorities to be monitored and held accountable to help safeguard the community.

1.9.9 Harmfulness perceptions

Perceived harmfulness is the primary factor influencing how serious a crime is perceived (Calmeiro, Sousa, & Cruz, 2024). Harm to others is often seen as the severest moral transgression in all cultures. In general, actions that injure people physically or emotionally are regarded as immoral (Yun 2025:88). Moral norms and judgements are heavily influenced by harm, which stems from evolutionary and emotional causes. Perceptions of harm encompass not only physical or psychological damage, but also abstract, symbolic, and culturally contingent forms (Yun, 2025:90). This highlights that community members perceive an act of sexual offending as more serious and immoral the more detrimental it is professed to be.

1.9.10 Community-based sex offender management

Community-based sex offender management is community engagement and strategic alliances with stakeholders. Department of correctional services (DCS) interacts with community structures, such as probationers, parolees and their families (Department of Correctional Services, 2022b). The management of sexual offenders ought to be grounded in evidence-based practice, or what is known to "work" with this group. To make sure that those practices are up to date with the new science, they should be continuously observed and assessed (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2007). The literature demonstrates that community members should be involved in utilising tried-and-true methods and be regularly evaluated to guarantee their effectiveness.

1.9.11 Social work interventions

In general, social work interventions can be defined as scientifically proven procedures and patterns that social workers apply to issues involving individuals, communities, and groups (Ebue, Okala, & Agha, 2017: 85). A dictionary defines social work intervention as an act or fact of occurring between two individuals or times. The Collins dictionary defines intervention as the act of getting involved in a problem. Mediation and engagement are interchangeable terms for intervention (Ronad, 2021:3). Social work interventions play a critical role in improving social health outcomes by addressing the social determinants of health, promoting community involvement, and increasing mental and physical wellbeing (Padole, 2023:355). Positive results and solutions can be achieved by professional social workers' effective social work interventions. (Ronad, 2021:1). This highlights that social work interventions are organised methods by which social workers assist in resolving issues and enhancing the wellbeing of victims, families, and community members before, during, and following the reintegration of sex offenders.

1.9.12 Stigma

According to Kusow (2015:4778), “stigma” refers to a social or personal characteristic that is degraded and discredited in a certain social setting. Kadhim and Jabur (2025:335) state that stigma includes discrimination, isolation, devaluation, generalisation, and categorisation. It is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that is the result of interactions between individual, societal, and structural elements. This may indicate that, due to the shameful labelling and exclusion of sexual offenders, barriers are created on a psychological, societal, and structural level.

1.9.13 Recidivism

The term "recidivism," which comes from the Latin recidivus (or, falling back), refers to a convicted criminal's propensity to commit new crimes. After being released from prison, the criminal either chooses to remain in the criminal environment or is unable to reintegrate into society due to specific barriers (Sanyal, 2020:1). The phrase "recidivism" (sometimes referred to as "reoffending") refers to whether or not an individual who is the subject of a criminal justice intervention (penalty) proceeds to commit additional offences (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, 2018:9). This reflects the propensity of criminals to "fall back" into crime following sentencing, and community members are conscious that sexual offenders are not exempted.

1.10 ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS

Ethical approval to conduct the research was attained from the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review committee of the University of South Africa and the research was considered as a medium risk (Ethics Reference Number: 45909075 _CREC_CHS_2021) (see Appendix G). As a registered social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), the researcher adhered to the Council’s Code of Ethics for social workers (SACSSP, 2012). During this research, the researcher followed the ethical considerations of avoidance of harm; informed consent confidentiality and anonymity; beneficence; management of information; and

debriefing of participants. The nature and application of these ethical considerations is described in detail in Chapter 3.

1.11 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The research report consists of the following chapters:

Chapter 1: General Introduction

This chapter introduces the study by outlining the problem formulation and the rationale underpinning the research. It further presents the purpose of the research, central question, overall goal, and specific objectives. An overview of the research methodology employed is provided, together with the ethical considerations guiding the study and clarification of key concepts. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the dissemination of the research findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and theoretical framework

This chapter encompasses a comprehensive literature study of pertinent scholarly materials, such as journals, papers, research reports, books, and other relevant sources, that are directly related to the issue under investigation. It further discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study, providing a conceptual foundation for understanding and analysing the research problem.

Chapter 3: Application of the qualitative research process

This chapter details the application of the research methodology and describes the use of the qualitative research approach, research designs, study setting, population and sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis methods, trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research. They are discussed and compared with the prevailing literature through literature control.

Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions, limitations and recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of the research findings, draws conclusions, discuss limitations and presents recommendations based on the research outcomes.

1.12 DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The dissemination of research results is the purposeful process by which research is communicated to audiences, with the intention of spreading awareness, promoting use, and maximising impact. The results can be published in various ways such as dissertations, theses, assemblies, books, and the internet. Mauldin (2020) states that dissemination of results requires planned consideration of audiences and contexts for receiving research findings, intentional communication about research, and purposeful engagement with policymakers and service-related stakeholders to facilitate evidence-informed decision-making and professional practice. Scott, Atkins, D'Costa, Rendle, Murphy et al. (2024) further note that dissemination aims to ensure research reaches those who will use the evidence; those who may be affected by the evidence; or those who can affect its use. Ultimately, dissemination should move beyond the typical reporting of research results by making research knowledge accessible and relevant to practitioners who may use it to inform policy or intervention development.

In the context of this research study, the research results will be primarily presented in the form of a dissertation. The research findings will further be presented in the form of a report to the participants involved in the research study. An article on this research will be compiled for submission, review, and possible publication in a professional journal. The dissertation is submitted for examination with the aim of achieving a master's degree.

1.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter One introduces the burning issue of sexual violence in South Africa and the resulting challenges faced by sex offenders during reintegration into their communities. The problem statement highlights the high recidivism rates and the lack of supportive community structures, which undermine rehabilitation efforts. The rationale for the study is rooted in the scarcity of South African research on community perspectives of reintegration, particularly through a social work lens. The chapter presents the central research question, the study's goals, and objectives, and clarifies key concepts such as community, reintegration, rehabilitation, and sex offender. The structure of the research

report and plans for dissemination are also provided, establishing the foundational direction for the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The reintegration of sex offenders into communities is a complicated and multidimensional matter that involves various societal, psychological, and legal considerations. Understanding community perspectives on this matter is important for developing effective policies and programmes that poise public safety with the rehabilitation needs of offenders. This literature review explores the historical context, community attitudes, challenges, and best practices related to the reintegration of sex offenders. By examining existing research, the review seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing community responses and the impact of these perspectives on reintegration efforts. This chapter also identifies gaps in the literature and proposes directions for future research to enhance our understanding of this critical issue.

2.2 BACKGROUND

Although sex-related offences occur across cultures, the social responses to sex offenders differ considerably depending on cultural beliefs, moral perceptions, media influence, and community fears surrounding sexual violence. They affect not only the victims' families but also the community at large. After serving a prison sentence, sex offenders are reintegrated into the same communities from which they came. The reintegration of sex offenders presents unique challenges due to the stigma, fear, and moral judgement often associated with sexual offences. With this support, assistance, and supervision, sex offenders will be helped to lead crime-free lives upon release (Richards et al., 2020; Caeiro, Bheemaiah, Devaseelan, Varghese, & D'Souza, 2024). Conversely, literature also suggests that reintegration efforts involving sex offenders remain highly contested, as communities often prioritise public safety concerns above rehabilitation objectives. This creates tension between rehabilitation ideals and punitive societal responses (Gross, 2017; Edwards & Mottarella, 2014).

However, for programmes to have a positive effect, the community must also be receptive to the offenders to adapt and not reoffend (Chin, 2012:81). According to Cardoso, Quintas and Santos (2025:2), sex offenders are considered to be among the most stigmatised groups of criminals, and they face harsh repercussions like social exclusion, public recognition, and exclusion from social groups, organisations, and activities. This stigma may significantly undermine reintegration efforts, as exclusion from employment, housing, and social networks may increase social isolation and potentially hinder rehabilitation outcomes. Literature therefore reflects an ongoing tension between community protection and sex offender reintegration. Familial bonds and social support exert a more significant influence on human behaviour than sanctions, limitations, and castigations, which frequently hinder community reintegration and promote recidivism (Chamberlain & Wallace, 2015), so while several scholars support rehabilitative and supportive approaches, other literature argues that communities remain reluctant to support reintegration due to fears of recidivism and perceptions that sex offenders present a permanent risk. This suggests that, since stigma, fear, and moral judgment create structural impediments that other offender groups do not encounter, sex offender reintegration is distinctly different. Resulting in superior illogicality between rehabilitative aspirations and punishing society responses.

As Dhiman and Bose (2023) explain, the social environment includes factors such as family and friends, community, culture, and the media which can influence people's attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour. For this reason, it is vital to understand how these types of relationships can affect others, whether negatively by continuing to perpetuate damaging ideals, or positively by encouraging better behaviour and social attitudes. Relatedly, it is important to understand the general public's perspective of people who have committed sexual offences. Public opinion can affect how likely these people are to be accepted, helped, and moved forward with their life after an offence. In this regard, Snape and Fido (2021) outline that while there are people who focus on the victim once an offence happens, society as a whole can affect how well these people are reintegrated into society by preventing or helping them. These findings imply that, compared to other offender groups, the reintegration of sex offenders is particularly distinct because marginalisation makes communities significantly less receptive,

consequential in more intense conflicts between public safety apprehensions and rehabilitation aspirations.

For many generations South Africa has faced structural violence, poverty, and inequality (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022:119). Widespread violence during apartheid had devastating consequences on individuals and communities that live on for generations. As a result of this systemic violence, normalising violence in some homes and communities became apparent. The conditions that still exist within South Africa pose a significant challenge to children's development and threaten sustainable development. Considering this alarming backdrop, it becomes necessary to unpack what sexual offences and categories entail in the eyes of the law. This suggests that, compared to other types of crime, communities are significantly less ready to embrace and help sexual offenders due to the intense stigma, moral judgment, and increased fears of permanent harm associated with sexual offences.

2.3 DEFINITIONS AND TYPES OF SEXUAL OFFENCES

The following definitions and types of sexual offences are related to this study:

2.3.1 The sex offender

Sexual offences encompass a broad range of unlawful sexual behaviours. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007) defines sexual offences as any sexual act committed without the consent of one party. The term 'sex offender' is the tag given by government (the police, courts and correctional systems), the community, and the media to indicate the person as someone who has been involved in illegitimate sexual engagements. A label sticks with such people throughout their journey in the criminal justice system and often long after they are no longer under its purview (Ilea, 2018:13). A sex offender is thus regarded as anybody who commits a sexual offence regardless of whether it is committed against a child or an adult (Mollema, 2015:17). The National Institute of Justice (2019) and Reed (2017:16) attest that sex offenders are individuals who have committed a sexual

offense, such as rape, sexual assault, voyeurism, exhibitionism, paedophilia, and molestation.

Sex offenders are usually not strangers to the victims, and might be a current or ex-lover, member of the society known to the victim or a family member, according to studies in India, Canada and South Africa (Parveen, Nadeem, Aslam & Sohail, 2010:735). In the broader populace, the designation 'sex offender' is markedly more often linked to consensus on policies aimed at regulating this group, compared to those referred to as 'individuals who have perpetrated a sexual crime' (Harris & Socia, quoted by Snape & Fido, 2021). A wide range of sexual practices that cause discomfort, fear, or menace to a victim are considered sexual offences, which are defined as sexual activities to which a person has not given their consent (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2020:3). Sexual offences include sexual assault, rape, attempted sexual offences, and contact sexual offence.

2.3.2 Sexual assault

Sexual assault is sexual contact between persons without legal consent, most commonly defined by age, but also capacity. Rape is a form of sexual assault that includes penetration, however slight, of the vaginal or anal opening (Sachs & Chapman, 2020). It is a gendered crime that is disproportionately perpetrated by males against females and predicated on power and control (Murphy-Oikonen, McQueen, Miller, Chambers & Hiebert, 2022:18). According to Bedera and Haltom (2018) sexual assault is defined as any loss of physical autonomy that results from unwanted sexual behaviour. This broad definition encompasses sexual activity enacted through physical force, as well as sexual activity enacted through incapacitation, coercion, and other forms of power imbalance. It covers not just rape, but also other forms of unwanted sexual contact. While rape can involve physical force, sexual assault also covers forcing someone to engage in sexual contact through intimidation, threats, or fear. In countries where rape laws are in effect, sexual assault includes all other forms of sexual contact, including coercing consent or touching the victim without penetrating (World Health Organization (WHO), 2002).

2.3.3 Rape

Rape is defined as any forced sexual act (such as oral, anal, or vaginal sexual penetration) that is carried out using physical force, threats, violence, abuse of authority, and, most importantly, lack of consent. In contrast, sexual coercion is only used in situations where aggressive methods do not involve the use of physical force or violence, usually in situations where there is a relationship in which the perpetrator has authority or trust (Barroso, Greco, Pham & Thibaut, 2019:170). Rape is often defined as the penetration of the genitalia or anus without consent (Buckner & Temme, 2024). In some places, rape is also referred to as sexual battering or sexual assault. Under South African Law, the definition of rape is found in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, defining rape as follows: “A person who unlawfully and intentionally commits an act of penetration without the consent of the complainant is guilty of the offence of rape” (South Africa, 2007).

2.3.4 Sexual Offence

A sexual offence is a sexual act that is performed or attempted by someone else without the victim's free consent or against someone who is incapable of giving consent or refusing (Basile, DeGue, Jones, Freire, Lang et al., 2014; Soldino, López-Pinar & Carbonell-Vayá, 2024:1). Any sexual act, attempt to perform a sexual act, unwanted sexual remarks or advances, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality, using coercion, by any person, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work, is considered a sexual offence (Republic of Sierra Leone, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, 2020:13). According to Lomax and Meyrick (2022) sexual violence and abuse frequently take the form of rape and sexual assault. Within South Africa this includes “any form of penetration of a person’s body by another person, object, or animal; or any physical contact or directed sexual behaviour towards an individual, by another person or persons: verbally, physically, or by means of an intermediary, or any other means” (Helen Suzman Foundation, 2026)

2.3.5 Contact sexual offence

Sexual contact is defined as unlawful sexual contact that typically entails the use of force against a person without that person's agreement, is inflicted against a person who is unable to give consent due to age, physical or mental incapacity, or who positions the attacker in a position of power or trust. This includes penetration of the vulva or anus with the penis, other body parts, or an object that is physically or otherwise coerced without consent, even if it is just mild insertion of a person's or an object's genital organs into another person's genital organs, either fully or partially (Republic of Sierra Leone, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, 2020:13). According to the classic common law definition, rape consists of three elements: vaginal penetration, lack of permission, and the accused person's direct involvement (Adoch, 2022:71).

2.4 PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault is a global issue that has lifelong consequences for both perpetrators and victims (Wolf, 2021:7). Kahonde (2022:1) are of the opinion that in South Africa, sexual violence is pervasive. According to the World Health Organization, nearly one in three women worldwide has experienced sexual violence (Van Berlo & Ploem, 2018:6). South Africa has an alarmingly high rate of sexual offences, with nearly 53765 reported cases of sexual offences in 2022–2023, an increase from the previous year of 1101 cases compared to 52664 cases reported in 2021-2022 (Cowling, 2024:1). The reported rape rate in South Africa was 72.1/100 000 in 2019/2020 (World Population Review 2023). The total number of sexual offences recorded in South Africa in 2018/19 by the South African Police Service Statistics (2019) can be depicted as follows:

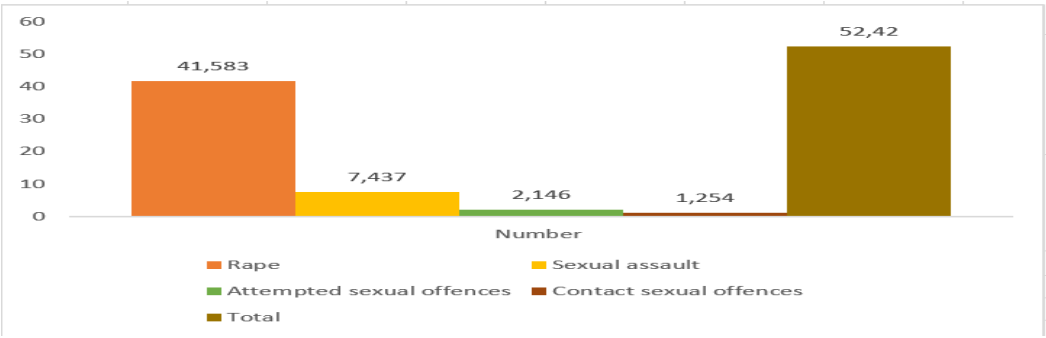

Figure 2-1 Sexual Offences 2018/2019 (South African Police Service Statistics, 2019)

The police's rape statistics are however not always accurate as such criminal offences are sometimes under-reported, as the Institute for Security Studies warns (Vetten, 2014). Currently, there is no nation-wide descriptive estimated figure of females that are raped in South Africa calculated yearly (The Citizen, 2019). According to the then Minister of Police, Bheki Cele on the occasion of the release of the third quarter crime statistics for the financial year 2023/24 (South African, 2024), 4,783 suspects were arrested during that period for sexual offences related crimes such as rape and attempted rape (South African Police Service, (SAPS), 2024).

While women and girls are disproportionately affected, men and boys are also victims. In Australia, one in five women and one in 20 men have reported experiencing a sexual offence since the age of 15 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Reports indicate that between 4–8% of boys and 12–16% of girls have experienced penetrative abuse (Richards et al., 2020:53). In Sierra Leone, sexual violence is a significant human rights and public health issue that affects men, women, girls, and boys equally (Republic of Sierra Leone, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, 2020:6).

Sexual offences are a serious social problem because of how common they occur and the long-lasting effects they have on both persons and society. Over 433,000 rapes and sexual assaults are thought to occur annually in the United States alone, and many other countries voice similar concerns (Tuschick, Portnoy, Carthy, Gair, Hackett et al., 2025a:1). These sexual offences are perceived as a serious challenge with prominent effects on victims, their families, and society at large (Yates, 2013:89). Intimate partner violence is often efficient and includes comparable physical, sexual and emotional violence. It may take diverse forms, be conducted by different perpetrators all through the generation, and have a severe straight and unintended health significance. Moreover, children who witness violence are indirect victims, and are impacted (Gender Toolbox, 2015:9).

Sexual violence not only affects the individual victim/ survivor, but also has an impact on relatives, close friends, eyewitnesses of violence and the whole of society. Sexual offences have a reflective and distinctive impression upon those who experience them,

and they posture specific encounters for criminal justice response. While common apprehensions can be acknowledged in victims' experience of the criminal justice system regardless of crime type, for those who have suffered rape or sexual assault, agitations are predominantly critical. Not least because these are misconducts that basically confront a victim's sense of self-worth and dominance (Burman & Brooks-Hay, 2021:3). Therefore, the effective arresting and rehabilitation of these offenders are of utmost importance. This task poses a daunting challenge for the police and for the criminal justice system holistically and internationally. According to the Minister of Police's Third quarter statistics for 2024 –

- 112 life sentences were handed down to 89 rapists and gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) perpetrators.
- 64 rapists and GBVF perpetrators were each handed down 20 years and above imprisonment sentences.
- 172 rapists and GBVF perpetrators were handed 10 to 19 years imprisonment.
- 261 rapists and GBVF perpetrators were handed down 1 to 9 years imprisonment (South African Government, 2024)

These statistics emphasise the widespread nature of sexual offences and the need for effective interventions in prevention and reintegration efforts. These figures accentuate the growing reliance on incarceration as a punitive measure, reinforcing the necessity for structured reintegration programmes that can effectively rehabilitate offenders and reduce recidivism. Within the South African context, high levels of sexual and gender-based violence may intensify community fear and reduce willingness to support reintegration initiatives involving sex offenders.

To fully grasp the current landscape of reintegration strategies, it is important to examine the context and evolution of laws that have shaped the management and rehabilitation of sex offenders.

2.5 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS GUIDING REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF SEX OFFENDERS

The rehabilitation and reintegration of sex offenders into South African communities are regulated through national legislation and policy frameworks. Although international human rights instruments and United Nations standards emphasise offender rehabilitation and reintegration as important mechanisms for reducing recidivism and promoting public safety (Chin, 2012:4), offender management and rehabilitation are primarily governed at national level. The African criminal justice system similarly recognises rehabilitation and reintegration as a collective social responsibility, although greater awareness is still needed within families and communities regarding the importance of supporting reintegrated offenders (Chanakira & Chikadzi, 2017:294).
In South Africa, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) upholds the rights to dignity, equality, freedom, and humane detention conditions, while also recognising the responsibility of the courts to impose deterrent sentences where necessary for community protection (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Rehabilitation is primarily regulated through the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998, which identifies rehabilitation as a key purpose of correctional services and mandates structured pre-release programmes to prepare offenders for reintegration into communities (Republic of South Africa, 1998). The Act further introduced Community Corrections to support offender supervision and rehabilitation after release.

The White Paper on Corrections (Republic of South Africa, 2005) further positions rehabilitation and reintegration as a societal responsibility requiring collaboration between the Department of Correctional Services, communities, families, and civil society organisations. Legislation such as the Criminal Law Amendment Act 105 of 1997 and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 introduced stricter sentencing measures and frameworks for the management of sex offenders in South Africa (South Africa, 2007). In addition, specialised structures such as the SAPS Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units and Thuthuzela Care Centres were established to strengthen responses to sexual violence and improve support for victims (Vetten, 2014:5).

Additional legislation relevant to offender diversion and supervision includes the Probation Services Act 116 of 1991 and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008. Furthermore, restorative justice initiatives and structured pre-release programmes increasingly emphasise reintegration, rehabilitation, and collaboration between government institutions and non-governmental organisations (Padayachee, 2008; Chikadzi, Chanakira & Mbululu, 2022:1). Despite these legislative and policy frameworks supporting rehabilitation and reintegration, community responses may not always align with rehabilitative objectives, particularly in relation to sex offenders who continue to face stigma, fear, and social exclusion after release.

2.6 REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

Gahler (2017:76) points out that the intensification of sexual crimes in South Africa stresses a compassionate awareness on sexual crimes and what can be done about it, whether the rehabilitation of sex offenders is possible within South African correctional centres. In terms of section 276 A of the Criminal Procedures Amendment Act 51 of 1977 (Republic of South Africa, 1977 and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment, Act 32 of 2007:25) (South Africa, 2007), retribution of an imprisoned person for a sexual misconduct can comprise of attendance and involvement in a particular action programme for sex delinquents. The South African Department of Correctional Services (DCS) has a constitutional decree to deliver rehabilitation programmes that address offender's criminal actions (Murhula & Singh, 2019:21).

2.6.1 Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation refers to the process of reforming offenders and reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Buljubašić, 2019:71). International frameworks such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules ('the Nelson Mandela Rules') recognise rehabilitation and preparation for reintegration into society as key purposes of imprisonment (Naylor & Winford, 2019:114). Rehabilitation further involves identifying offenders' developmental, social, psychological, and behavioural needs in order to support positive change and reduce criminal behaviour (Ward, Fox & Garber, 2014:26). There is conflicting evidence about

the efficacy of sex offender programs in lowering recidivism; some studies indicate favourable results (from certain types of therapy), while other studies indicate minimal impact (Edwards & Hensley; Marshall; Clarke, Brown, & Völlm, 2017:2).

In South Africa, the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 requires the Department of Correctional Services to provide rehabilitation programmes aimed at addressing offenders' educational, social, psychological, and developmental needs to promote improved social functioning and reintegration (Marshall, 2024:2). The Preparatory Programme on Sexual Offences' primary goal is to engage sexual offenders in a correctional program that addresses their sexual offending conduct by acquiring the necessary information and skills (DCS, 2012:12). In South Africa, rehabilitation programmes include education, social work interventions, life skills training, anger management, therapeutic services, pre-release support, and economic reintegration initiatives (Murhula & Singh, 2019:21; Department of Correctional Services, 2022a:7). Before implementing effective programs for sex offenders, Sahutskeo (2012) state the need to highlight the reasons why jail is ineffective. While incarceration is challenging for all offenders, it is particularly challenging for those who commit sexual offences. Most sexual offenders have mental illnesses. Incarceration is not the only way to rehabilitate them. Sex offenders have complicated issues that need to be addressed with well-thought-out programs aimed at rehabilitation, or else things will only get worse. In summary, most sexual offenders suffer from mental illnesses that cannot be cured by incarceration. Therefore, several programs have been taken into account concerning various aspects of sex offenders (Avila 2020:80).

Correctional institutions also provide targeted programmes such as crossroads social work interventions, new beginnings, and pre-release life skills training (Department of Correctional Services, 2022a:7). As Kheswa and Lobi (2014) emphasise, sex offenders in particular require comprehensive rehabilitation to ensure they can safely reintegrate into society. Recognising this correlation in populations of sexual offenders highlights the necessity for treatment that integrates trauma therapy into professional practice. Even if a client has successfully finished treatment, there is always a chance that significant clinical difficulties will go untreated, even though therapies that do not emphasise the existence of trauma can and have reduced recidivism rates. As a result,

the recidivism rate may be reduced even more than it has already been (Avila 2020:80). According to Kolb (2024:3), there is a clear connection between sexual deviance and dysregulation in this domain. This includes a section on sexual regulation abilities. The handbook also contains worksheets, ideas for group discussions, psychoeducational material for therapists to share with clients, and role play situations to assist clients in honing their abilities in a group environment.

Although rehabilitation programmes aim to reduce recidivism and support reintegration, sex offenders face rejection from communities after release. This may undermine rehabilitation outcomes despite institutional efforts to promote behavioural change. Reintegration therefore depends not only on correctional rehabilitation, but also on community willingness to accept and support reintegrated offenders.

2.6.2 Reintegration

Offender reintegration refers to the process of transitioning individuals from incarceration back into society. Under the auspices of the DCS, Community Corrections holds the responsibility of promoting the acceptance and social reintegration of offenders into their respective communities by fostering an environment that supports successful reintegration. Its establishment aligns with Section 50 of the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998), which mandates the DCS' operation of Community Corrections and underscores its role in ensuring the effective reintegration of offenders into society Handbook on Strategies to Reduce Reoffending (UNODC, 2022). Integration of the offender into the community and a reduction or cessation of criminal behaviour are the main objectives of sex offender reintegration. This draws attention to both the offender's and society's obligations and requirements (McAlinden, 2016:17).

Additionally, more recent studies have demonstrated that "helping sex offenders to discontinue" through circles can benefit community volunteers and result in significant "cost savings" for the criminal justice system (Höing et al.; Elliott & Beech; cited by McAlinden, 2016:5). The South African criminal justice system views the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders as a collective societal responsibility (Zondi, 2012:767).

The White Paper on Corrections in South Africa (Department of Correctional Services (DCS), 2005:85-86) emphasises that effective rehabilitation and reintegration require the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Correctional services encourage communities to accept ex-offenders back into society and assist them during their reintegration journey.

The first few years after high-risk sex offenders are released from prison into the community have the highest risk of reoffending, according to Hanson et al., cited by Richards et al. (2020:12). The longer an offender stays offence-free in the community, the lower the risk of recidivism (Hanson et al., 2014:12). Sex offenders who receive treatment during reintegration period are less likely to commit crimes again, according to research. It is crucial to comprehend community-based reintegration programs, which assist criminals in reintegrating into society and leading law-abiding lives after serving time in prison (Willis & Grace; referenced by; Richards et al., 2020:7). Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs reminds us that all humans require safety, social connection, self-esteem, and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). Recognising these needs within the reintegration process fosters trust and dignity (Elliott et al., cited by Levenson, 2017:108).

Community reintegration for sex offenders is often more complicated than for other offenders because sexual crimes are strongly associated with fear, perceived dangerousness, and moral outrage. In South Africa, sex offenders have identified one of their greatest challenges in reintegration as repairing fractured relationships with their families and communities. Because many offenders come from tightly knit communities where legal transgressions quickly become public knowledge, stigmatisation and social exclusion often follow them long after release (Chanakira & Chikadzi, 2017:298). This stigmatisation undermines reintegration efforts and perpetuates isolation, making it harder for offenders to rebuild trust and adopt prosocial roles. An empirical study on sex offender desistance, according to McAlinden (2016:15), reveals that, in contrast to non-sexual offenders, sex offenders appear to take different paths to desistance and reintegration. Although relationships and jobs are still important informal social controls for the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, they do not function in the same manner for this particular population. Their importance, however, emphasises the need

to take into account the offender's agency as well as the social context that could obstruct reintegration and desistance.

Professionals and society, have to acknowledge the significance of giving offenders a different future identity and the role that social ties and supports play in supporting this process to bridge the gap between what has been referred to as "imagined" desistance and "authentic" desistance. However, reconsidering sex offender reintegration is eventually necessary to break away from the label of sex offender (Healy & Soyer, cited by McAlinden, 2016:15). For sex offenders, the two main objectives are safe absorption into the community and the reduction or cessation of criminal behaviour (McAlinden, 2016). It can be challenging for sex offenders to successfully reintegrate into society, regardless of whether they have taken part in treatment. However, lowering the chance of reoffending requires effective reintegration. For instance, loneliness and isolation may increase the likelihood of sexual offences. Therefore, it stands to reason that communities that do not successfully reintegrate felons may also fail to reduce significant risk variables. Circles are a significant advancement in this kind of reintegration into the community (Edwards & Hensley; Marshall; Clarke, Brown, & Völlm, 2017:2). A deeper understanding of offender reintegration allows professionals, families, and communities to support the rehabilitation of offenders upon their release, ultimately reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Davis, Bahr & Ward, 2012:447).

South Africa has also developed community outreach strategies to encourage ex-offender resettlement. These strategies include the Imbizo programme, which seeks to raise public awareness and promote community participation in reintegration; outreach programmes showcasing the rehabilitation of formerly incarcerated people to inspire prevention; and community forums and ex-offender desks, which create aftercare structures offering livelihood support and guidance (Department of Correctional Services (DCS), 2020; 2022b:13). These initiatives demonstrate that reintegration is not the sole responsibility of correctional facilities but requires sustained partnerships with civil society. Circles are successful in securing reintegration, lowering the risk of reoffending and managing risk, when involving the offender's family and the local community in the reintegrative process, and mediating between the offender's rehabilitation and local structures that act as barriers to reintegration (such as public

opposition to offender placement in the area) (Wilson et al.; Bates et al.; in McAlinden, 2016:5). Restorative justice approaches further strengthen reintegration by fostering accountability and healing. Such practices bring together victims, offenders, and communities in processes such as mediation, restitution, or community service to address harm caused by crime. By resolving underlying issues and including all stakeholders, RJ promotes fairness, reduces recidivism, and helps build safer communities (Raza, 2023:4). Social workers involved in reintegration processes may however face ethical and practice dilemmas when balancing offender rehabilitation with community safety concerns and victim sensitivities.

2.8 COMMUNITY RESPONSES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE REINTEGRATION OF SEX OFFENDERS

The community's response plays an important role in determining the outcomes of sexual offences within society. In highly developed countries, often referred to as 'First World' nations, community reactions tend to be more supportive and reassuring for victims. Communities provide emotional support and assistance in managing the trauma experienced by victims, but the situation differs significantly in many regions such as Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and other low-resource settings, where rape victims are often neglected, and the crimes themselves underreported or minimised. In such contexts, community responses can be destructive rather than restorative (Mamabolo & Maluleke, 2022:280). Violence against women and children, particularly child sexual abuse (CSA), remains a significant public health, human rights, and humanitarian crisis in South Africa (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022:119). These offences carry the potential to cause profound mental and physical damage to victims (Tumali, Paul & Mahanta, 2013:7).

Community members often hold incorrect and deeply rooted assumptions about sex offenders. According to Farkas and Yoder (2017:6), sex crimes evoke intense fear, anxiety, condemnation, and revulsion. According to Wolf (2021:39, 41, 42, 65, 83,104) the following negative perceptions are held by communities about it:

- **Fear and Anger:** Research indicates that sex offenders are viewed with fear, disgust, and anger by the community. They are considered one of the most despised groups of offenders within the criminal justice system, generating strong emotional responses, particularly towards those convicted of offenses against children, such as paedophiles and child molesters.
- **Belief in Non-rehabilitation:** A prevalent belief within the community is that sex offenders cannot be rehabilitated. For instance, in a study conducted in 1999, only about 4% of respondents believed that treatment could definitively help sex offenders reduce reoffending. The majority were sceptical, believing that treatment might only sometimes be effective or not helpful at all.
- **Stigmatisation:** The labelling of sex offenders contributes to their stigmatization, as terms used to describe them often dehumanise or reduce them to their offenses. Research shows that individuals are less likely to support rehabilitation initiatives when they view offenders primarily through the lens of their crime.
- **Community Acceptance:** Community acceptance poses a significant barrier to the reintegration of sex offenders. Many offenders internalise the negative community beliefs about their capacity for change, leading to feelings of shame and hopelessness regarding their rehabilitation efforts.
- **Misconceptions about Behaviour:** There is a common misconception that most sex offenders are likely to victimise strangers, while research indicates that a majority of sex offenses are committed by individuals known to the victim. This misunderstanding perpetuates negative stereotypes and reinforces public fear.

These perceptions contribute to a social instinct of anticipating repeated trauma, and communities may react by isolating, excluding, or controlling individuals they perceive as threats. Sex offenders are often perceived as permanently harmful or incapable of rehabilitation, which may intensify community resistance towards reintegration efforts. This reaction is often an attempt to re-establish a sense of safety by managing or avoiding factors that disturb the community's sense of peace and order (Lehloko, 2016:32). The media play a significant role in shaping these perceptions. People's responses to authority figures and law compliance are closely linked to how they perceive them (Bello & Matshaba, 2022:1). Social media, in particular, have transformed

communication styles, impacted self-perception, and altered the dynamics of interpersonal interaction (Omar & Ondimu, 2024:97). While news reports about specific incidents, such as a rape case or victim testimony, may create immediate emotional responses, these effects can either fade quickly or become embedded in long-term cognitive patterns known as mental models. These models affect public views on crime and safety beyond the immediate incident, informing broader social narratives and anxieties (Shehata, Andersson, Glogger, Hopmann, Andersen et al., 2021:80).

Importantly, media consumption does not occur in isolation. People engage with news within their social networks, among friends, families, and colleagues, who help filter, verify, or reinforce what is consumed. These interpersonal interactions influence whether media messages are accepted, questioned, or rejected. As Mutz and Young (2011), Schmitt-Beck (2003), Song and Boomgaarden (2017); Druckman and Nelson (2003) and Shehata et al. (2021:87) explain, interpersonal communication has been found to moderate media effects such as agenda-setting, framing, and spirals of reinforcement. This process of social verification may either deepen existing stigma or foster more balanced perspectives on reintegration.

The demographic profile of community members further influences their attitudes towards sex offenders. The term "demographics," derived from the Greek words *demos* (people) and *graphy* (picture), refers to characteristics such as age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. These factors shape individual and collective responses to crime and rehabilitation (Lee & Schuele; Broadhead; Morris et al., cited by Jones, St Peter & Ruckle, 2020:1). Social environments, including relationships with family, culture, religion, education, and community norms, play a major role in shaping people's values, actions, and beliefs (Dhiman & Bose, 2023:1). Families in particular serve as the primary agents of socialisation, transmitting norms and values across generations, and acting as behavioural role models.

Cognitive schemas - internalised mental frameworks for organising information - also influence how individuals interpret crime, offenders, and justice. These schemas, made up of perceived attributes and relationships between concepts, help simplify the complexities of societal issues (Fiske & Taylor, 2017). According to Cottam et al. (cited

by Shehata et al., 2021:77), societal views are formed through associative patterns between objects and attributes. In the context of sex offenders, these associations often include assumptions of danger, unpredictability, or permanent deviance, which can heavily impact reintegration efforts.

Community perceptions are thus central to either supporting or undermining rehabilitation of sex offenders. Perspectives that community members hold about sex offenders are instrumental in shaping whether reintegration is achievable. This indicates that reintegration is not solely an individual offender process, but a socially negotiated process shaped by broader societal attitudes, fear, and moral judgement. As noted by Harper, Hogue, and Bartels (2017:3), when public attitudes are predominantly negative, they obstruct efforts to restore offenders to society. When families and communities refuse to accommodate ex-offenders, they are left vulnerable to isolation, unemployment, and ultimately, recidivism (Wolf, 2021:82). Although communities may perceive exclusion as a protective response, literature suggests that prolonged social exclusion may unintentionally undermine rehabilitation and increase reintegration difficulties. The literature therefore demonstrates that community perceptions do not merely reflect attitudes towards sex offenders, but actively shape reintegration opportunities, rehabilitation outcomes, and social acceptance.

Community support for sex offenders is therefore essential, as it reduces the risk of reoffending and contributes to building a meaningful, law-abiding life (Freeman 2012:540). The literature therefore suggests that successful reintegration depends not only on offender rehabilitation effort perspectives that community members hold, but also on the willingness of communities to participate in reintegration processes. Without community support, reintegration initiatives may remain ineffective despite institutional rehabilitation efforts. In recognition of this, the South African Cabinet (2005:7) approved the draft White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2005), replacing the earlier 1994 policy (DCS, 1994). The goal is to ensure that individuals leaving correctional centres possess the necessary skills, attitudes, and social support to reintegrate as productive members of society.

At a broader level, universally accepted principles within international criminal justice systems acknowledge that rehabilitation and reintegration are core goals of legal and correctional interventions (UNODC, 2020:3). Mediation is increasingly recognised as an effective strategy for supporting reintegration, as it facilitates dialogue and reconciliation between offenders, victims, and communities. This process helps to address underlying harms and can significantly reduce the risk of reoffending (Raza, 2023:4).

The literature reviewed therefore suggests that community reintegration of sex offenders remains a highly contested process shaped by fear, stigma, and competing views regarding rehabilitation and public safety. Despite increasing international literature on reintegration, limited South African social work research has critically explored how communities themselves perceive these processes.

2.9 COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES AND ATTITUDES

Cognisance must be taken of community perspectives and attitudes that impact views on reintegration of sex offenders.

2.9.1 General attitudes towards sex offenders

The belief that an individual who has committed a crime once is likely to do so again tends to overshadow the positive work that rehabilitation institutions do, making it challenging for ex-offenders to make meaningful contributions to the development and transformation of their communities (Tigere & Ndlovu, 2019:25). This widely held opinion influences risk assessments, treatment plans, and laws, yet it can be founded on false assumptions about the causes of sexual offenders' recidivism. Treatment programmes, laws, and reintegration procedures are generally more concerned with the welfare of society than with the recovery and rehabilitation of individual offenders (Wolf, 2021:106).

When reintegrating into society at large, ex-offenders have a number of difficulties. These difficulties include being shunned by family and society, failing to enter the workforce, having a hard time readjusting to life outside prison after serving lengthy sentences, having a complex that negatively impacts their mental health, and receiving

insufficient or no after-care services. This raises the likelihood of recidivism among former criminals and significantly impairs the efficacy of offender reintegration. As a result, programming is still subpar inferior even in South Africa, where there is good legislation on offender rehabilitation and reintegration, such as the White Paper on Corrections 2005 (Department of Correctional Services (DCS), 2005). By definition, policies are just ideas until they are implemented well through programming (Chikadzi, 2017:1).

2.9.2 Factors influencing community perceptions (media, personal experience)

People's responses to authority and compliance with the law are likely to be influenced by their perceptions of them (Bello & Matshaba, 2022:1). Social media have changed communication styles, impacted self-perception, and altered the dynamics of interpersonal interactions (Omar & Ondimu, 2024:97). A news article about a specific incident will immediately evoke certain impressions, such as the specifics of how the victim's handbag was taken by the pickpocket. But after being exposed, this tangible series of events will swiftly disappear from recollection. Effects can also be more long-lasting, influencing perceptions of relatively larger collections of events or themes (mental models) that go beyond the immediate scenario (Omar & Ondimu, 2024:97). Schema accommodation is another aspect of persistent effects, which target perceptions of larger classes of people, events, and structures. This has impacted more general views of crime that extend beyond the pickpocketing tale. These could include opinions about the local community's situation or national crime trends, the broader reasons and effects of crime, or even more ethereal views like people's overall reliability (Shehata et al., 2021:80)

News intake by individuals does not occur in a vacuum or in social isolation. People are nested in social networks of friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances who serve as information sources and filters in more extensive online and social media communication flows. Beliefs and attitudes are socially verified and negotiated in respect to group standards through ordinary political discourse. As a result, social networks constantly mitigate the effects of media. The filtering theory posits that interpersonal communication works similarly to predispositions, informing individuals

about the legitimacy of media messages and their acceptability. Interpersonal communication has been shown to mitigate media effects like agenda-setting, framing, and reinforcing spirals (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Mutz & Young, 2011; Schmitt-Beck, 2003, Song & Boomgaarden, 2017; Wanta & Wu, as cited by Shehata et al., 2021:87).

2.9.3 Variations in attitudes based on demographics (age, gender, socio-economic status)

Demographical factors can affect how other people react to a person's actions (Broadhead, 2019; Lee & Schuele, 2012; Morris et al., cited by Jones, St Peter & Ruckle, 2020:1). According to Dhiman and Bose (2023:1) people's social contacts and relationships with others in their communities are referred to as their social environment. People's attitudes, actions, beliefs, and values can all be profoundly impacted by these interactions. Numerous elements, including friends, family, culture, education, religion, media, and community, can be considered part of the social environment. Family is frequently cited as the main socialisation source and is very important in determining how people behave. People learn social standards and values in the family, which are usually passed down from one generation to the next. Using both direct and indirect methods, family members impact each other's behaviour and act as role models for one another (Dhiman & Bose, 2023:1).

Cognitive schemas, or the mental models that organise how people see problems, events, and actors, serve as the foundation for beliefs about society. People arrange their cognitive representations of diverse societal issues as mental models, which are made up of objects, properties, and the relationships between these attributes, to simplify and understand the complicated and chaotic outside world (Fiske & Taylor, 2017). Accordingly, "associations people create between an object and its attributes" with respect to society issues can be used to describe societal views (Cottam et al., Potter, quoted by Shehata et al., 2021:77).

The literature reviewed demonstrates that community perceptions towards sex offenders are complex, emotionally driven, and often influenced by fear, stigma, and public safety concerns. These perceptions may shape reintegration opportunities and

influence whether rehabilitation efforts are ultimately successful. Media reporting, public discourse, and high levels of sexual violence in South Africa may further contribute to forms of moral panic surrounding sex offenders, reinforcing perceptions that sex offenders present a constant threat to communities.

2.10 CONSEQUENCES OF REINTEGRATION ON COMMUNITIES

The reintegration of offenders into society carries significant consequences, both positive and negative, with implications for the individual, the community, and the broader criminal justice system. This section explores the advantages and challenges associated with reintegration, highlighting the potential benefits for social cohesion and rehabilitation, as well as the risks and obstacles that may arise during the process.

2.10.1 Positive consequences

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2020) effective social reintegration programmes can enhance community safety by reducing recidivism rates. When offenders are successfully reintegrated, they are less likely to reoffend, which contributes to overall public safety. Building relationships of social support and control around offenders is crucial for their successful reintegration, highlighting the community's role in this process.

Programmes that incorporate RJ principles can help communities become more receptive to and engaged in supporting offenders' reintegration. Such programmes promote healing and community responsibility for reintegrating offenders, thereby strengthening social bonds. Successful reintegration also supports the economic wellbeing of communities. Offenders who gain employment and contribute positively to their community reduce the economic burden associated with crime and recidivism, ultimately benefiting community development (UNODC, 2020).

Reintegrating successfully into society can lead to a decrease in recidivism rates among sex offenders (McAlinden, 2016). Understanding and mitigating barriers can create more effective treatment approaches and re-entry plans, ultimately aiming to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Successful reintegration supports community safety by

providing a structured pathway for offenders to adapt back into society, thus lowering the risk of further crimes and ensuring that offenders can contribute positively to their communities. Reintegrating into society can enhance social acceptance and support networks for offenders, which can improve the offenders' mental wellbeing and stability. Supporting the reintegration of offenders strengthens family units and reduces the intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour. It also helps stabilise communities, particularly those already burdened by high incarceration rates (Singh, 2016:1). Successful reintegration can facilitate personal growth and healing for sex offenders, allowing them to rebuild their lives, develop a sense of purpose, and foster stability in their personal circumstances (UNODC, 2020).

2.10.2 Negative consequences

Reintegration of offenders into society has a profound impact on communities, both positive and negative, depending on how effectively it is managed. When reintegration is unsuccessful, former offenders often struggle with social adaptation due to stigmatisation and exclusion (Wolf, 2021). The stigma attached to sex offenders affects community acceptance and can lead to increased discrimination, violence, and harassment towards rehabilitating offenders. This stigmatisation not only impacts the offenders but may also result in negative experiences for their supportive family members. High recidivism rates among sex offenders may reflect poorly on a community's ability to support successful rehabilitation and reintegration. As communities enforce laws based largely on misconceptions about sex offenders, such legislation may inadvertently increase the rates of recidivism rather than preventing them. The perception that sex offenders cannot change may further hinder the development of supportive relationships necessary for rehabilitation. Communities that stigmatise sex offenders also risk creating an environment in which offenders have limited opportunities for acceptance, which is crucial for reducing recidivism. As a result, they are at increased risk of falling into a cycle of reoffending, reconviction, and repeated rejection by society, which perpetuates a pattern of criminal behaviour. This exclusion hampers their ability to secure employment, re-enter educational pathways, or rebuild social relationships and support systems (Wolf, 2021:82, 15, 117).

High recidivism rates strain the criminal justice system and contribute to overcrowding in prisons. This overcrowding further limits the availability and effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes, diminishing the system's capacity to support positive behavioural change. Beyond institutional challenges, the effects of imprisonment extend into economic and psychological domains. Many individuals experience financial exclusion, accumulate personal debt, and suffer from long-term mental health challenges as a result of incarceration. In addition, prolonged separation from families often leads to the breakdown of familial relationships and the erosion of social networks, weakening the community fabric and making reintegration even more difficult (UNODC, 2020). According to Mowen, Stansfield and Boman (2018:2), stable family ties and normative social connections are crucial for successful reintegration because they provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, all of which are critical for the psychological stability and wellbeing of individuals reintegrating into society. However, because of unrealistic expectations and past experiences, reconciling with their family can be difficult (Cardoso, Quintas & Santos, 2025:1546).

Because the community's social network and its ability to uphold order are often already compromised, the return of former convicts to such environments may lead to an increase in neighbourhood crime. As Clear, cited by Visher (2015:64), argues, ex-offenders frequently encounter stigmatisation and discrimination, suffer from weak ties with local residents, and find themselves excluded from meaningful community participation. These social disconnections worsen their marginalisation and reduce opportunities for successful reintegration. So, it can be argued that the societal context itself can contribute to sexual offences, where systemic inequality, social fragmentation, and lack of communal accountability perpetuate cycles of harm and vulnerability.

2.11 CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO REINTEGRATION

The main obstacles that sexual offenders reported facing them were dynamic rather than static, and they are primarily influenced by outside factors like a lack of acceptance in the community, a lack of social or familial support, a decline in self-esteem, a lack of purpose, and other obstacles related to limitations placed on the rehabilitation of sexual offenders (Wolf, 2021:iv). This covered all sexual offender typologies since, at this time,

treatment is not typology-specific, meaning that the processes of rehabilitation and reintegration are the same for all kinds of sex offenders (Wolf, 2021:16). The results showed that the three main obstacles to men's successful reintegration upon release were formal and cultural ones, like probation services, stigmatisation, and registration. Stability factors, like stable relationships, religion, and support groups, were crucial in enabling men to successfully reintegrate (Tuschick, Carthy, Wager & Chamberlain, 2024:1).

The challenges and barriers to reintegration are described in terms of the issues of social stigmatisation and discrimination, legal and regulatory barriers, housing and employment challenges, and psychological and emotional challenges faced by sex offenders.

2.11.1 Social stigmatisation and discrimination

A significant barrier to the successful reintegration of released prisoners into society has been stigmatisation, which is mostly caused by increased social exclusion, community fear about recidivism and public safety (Sakib, 2022:1). Studies have shown that social support and familial ties have a stronger influence on behaviour than rules, boundaries, and penalties; in fact, the latter frequently have a negative effect on community reintegration and promote reoffending (Cooley et al., cited by Tuschick, et al., 2024:1). Convicted sexual offenders also discussed the negative effects of being labelled as "sex offenders" on most aspects of their lives, such as employment prospects, shopping, rehabilitation, social interactions, not being seen as citizens, less opportunities, and harsher penalties (Bensel & Sample, Dubois & Ouellet, Harris & Levenson, Harris et al., Ievins & Mjåland, Liem & Weggemans, Russell et al., Sandbukt, Slater et al. Tewksbury & Lees, Tewksbury & Copes, Worley & Worley, cited by Tuschick et al., 2024:1). According to Chikadzi, Chanakira and Mbululu (2022:1) name-calling and negative labelling of offenders in prison were also noted to be a major factor that negatively affected many prisoners.

2.11.2 Legal and regulatory barriers

New regulations pertaining to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 were released by the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services on August 19, 2022 (South Africa. Department of Justice and Correctional Services, 2022:1). To deter reoffending and safeguard vulnerable individuals, these previous mentioned regulations aim to make it easier to comply with the Act by guaranteeing that the National Register of Sex Offenders contains the details of those who have been found guilty of sexual offences.

2.11.3 Housing, employment and related challenges

According to Visher (2015:61) getting a job and a place to live, obtaining health care and drug rehabilitation centres, setting up transportation, and forming prosocial relationships are just a few of the difficult and concurrent obstacles that face both men and women getting out of jail. Apart from personal traits, a person's familial setting, the community returning to, and the greater sociolegal environment defined by laws and regulations all have an impact on the reintegration process. Therefore, the process for sexual offenders attempting to reintegrate into society is made more difficult by these significant obstacles (Cardoso, Quintas & Santos, 2025:1545). These obstacles include finding work, stable housing, mending personal relationships, and dealing with social stigma.

2.11.4 Psychological and emotional challenges for sex offenders

According to Wolf (2021:107), obstacles related to sex offender experiences include a lack of support from the community, low self-esteem, a lack of purpose, job and monetary issues, and trouble locating suitable housing. Current treatment or risk assessments only evaluate these elements to a modest extent.

Research revealed that the three biggest obstacles sex offenders faced after being released were formal and cultural aspects of reintegration, such as registration, stigmatisation, and probation services; stability aspects, like supportive relationships,

religion, and positive relationships, were crucial for their successful reintegration (Tuschick, et al., 2024:1).

Sex offenders thus frequently encounter barriers unique to this offender group, including public identification, social isolation, housing restrictions, and exclusion from community activities. These challenges may also be particularly significant within the South African context, where communities are increasingly sensitised to sexual violence and gender-based violence.

2.12 REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES

According to Legodi and Dube (2023) community reintegration of offenders is one of South Africa's methods of rehabilitating offenders who have served a portion of their sentence in a correctional center. When referring to the reintegration of sex offenders into communities in South Africa, a range of programmes and approaches are employed, each aimed at balancing public safety with the offender's rehabilitation. These efforts are framed within legal, correctional, social, and community-based structures, reflecting both international standards and local policy frameworks. South Africa currently implements 13 endorsed correctional programmes aimed at criminogenic factors of crime and will immensely contribute to the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders upon their release (UNODC, 2022).

2.12.1 Correctional and Rehabilitation Programmes

Psychosocial services, educational programmes, life skills training, anger management, substance abuse treatment, and therapeutic interventions tailored to address the behavioural and psychological factors underlying sexual offending are essential components of comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programmes aimed at reducing recidivism and supporting offenders' successful reintegration into the community (Murhula & Singh, 2019:21). Prisons in South Africa provide programmes for training in vocational skills. Voluntary participation in these programmes allows ex-offenders to use their abilities to support themselves after being released from prison. Various crafts are taught, such as carpentry, welding, motor repair, building, and farming. While serving their sentences, certain inmates may even study for and obtain

official university degrees. These offenders typically require a sponsor to pay for their education. Despite being provided in prison, these programmes are thought to be essential to the success of reintegration initiatives (Chikadzi et al., 2022:6).

Faith-based initiatives are also part of the South African rehabilitation landscape. These initiatives focus on moral and spiritual transformation and are often facilitated by religious volunteers and organisations who provide counselling, mentorship, and a sense of purpose to offenders (Tigere & Ndlovu 2019:31; UNODC, 2018).

2.12.2 Community Outreach and Reintegration Models

At the community level, the DCS promotes reintegration through Community Outreach Programmes, which include initiatives like *Imbizo*, *Community Forums*, and *Ex-Offender Desks*. These programmes are designed to sensitise communities, reduce stigmatisation, and build local support systems that help facilitate the offender's smooth return. They also promote a participatory model in which communities become active partners in crime prevention and rehabilitation (DCS, 2020; 2022b:13).

This community-centred approach is strengthened at a policy level by the White Paper on Corrections (2005) (DCS 2005), which reinforces the idea that reintegration is a societal responsibility and not merely the duty of correctional services. It emphasises partnerships with NGOs, traditional leaders, and civil society to support post-release monitoring, accommodation, skills development, and employment opportunities for ex-offenders. These policy commitments provide the foundation upon which South Africa's broader reintegration strategy is built.

In line with these principles, South Africa's Department of Correctional Services adopts a human rights-based approach to rehabilitation and reintegration, guided by the White Paper on Corrections (DCS 2005) and international standards such as the Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations, 2015). Individual evaluations and development plans for offenders are part of this, with a focus on "after-care" services and the idea of prisons as a social duty. In some situations, victim-offender mediation is one of the general restorative justice concepts used by South African courts.

Beyond state-led initiatives, international community-based models further illustrate how reintegration can be strengthened through structured community involvement. One such model is Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) (Gilliam, Novak, Northcutt Bohmert & Duwe, 2020:409). This particular community-based intervention, which has its roots in Canada, focusses on using trained community volunteers to create "circles" of support around people convicted of sexual offences in order to assist their reintegration while maintaining accountability. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have all adopted this concept. In 1994, CoSAs were developed to address high-risk persons convicted of sexual offences and facilitate their reintegration into society. The CoSA approach aims to reintegrate individuals convicted of sexual offences into society by providing social support, with the goal of reducing public safety risks. CoSA emphasises offender accountability and the significance of following community supervision processes. The benefits are twofold: successful reintegration of former offenders into the society and better public safety through meeting their social needs (Gilliam et al., 2020:409).

Although South Africa ascribes to the values of rehabilitation and restorative justice philosophies through policy documentation, systems like CoSA have yet to be formally adopted by the criminal justice system. Community accountability is promoted through correctional policy such as the White Paper on Corrections (2005) and collaboration with civil society but there is no indication of cohesive national implementation of a CoSA-programme for high-risk sexual offenders.

2.12.3 Restorative Justice Approaches

South Africa has also embraced RJ as a means of addressing the harms caused by crime. This includes facilitated dialogue between offenders, victims, and community representatives, focusing on accountability, healing, and reintegration rather than punishment alone. These approaches are particularly important in communities with strong communal ties, as they allow space for forgiveness, reconciliation, and re-acceptance (Criminal Justice Handbook Series, 2018:41; Raza, 2023:4). According to Murhula and Tolla (2020:4) the South African Justice Crime Prevention and Security

Cluster (JCPS) a Cabinet-mandated, multi-departmental body designed to ensure that all people in South Africa are and feel safe, has adopted the RJ approach in response to the challenges faced by the criminal justice system and to simultaneously transform the administration of justice for a number of reasons (Skelton, 2013). These reasons include the fact that RJ is largely informed by native and customary responses to criminal activity, and that it encompasses both internal and external criminal justice system processes, such as "non-state forms of ordering and justice" (Skelton, 2013).

Restorative justice and the judicial systems used by Africans in their customs and communities are comparable. These systems have also been used in urban settings like street committees and courts of the people. The legal policy framework of the justice system has also been positively impacted by case law and practice, which highlight the values of respect for dignity and initiatives like diversion, even though they are not formally integrated within the criminal justice system (Murhula & Tolla, 2020:11).

The introduction of RJ into the criminal justice system in South Africa is characterised as a novel approach to administering justice, either as an alternative or as part of the current criminal justice system, and that, while according to Skelton and Batley (2008), victims are constantly at the centre and offenders are held accountable. The criminal justice system may be able to give victims' needs more careful consideration thanks to restorative justice. The goal of victim restoration cannot be limited to an oversimplified understanding of victims' needs and the intricate procedures involved in their rehabilitation (Murhula & Tolla, 2020:11).

2.12.4 Post-Release Support Services

Post-release, offenders may access services provided by organisations such as NICRO, Khulisa, and the Gauteng Rehabilitation Trust, which offer counselling, housing support, job readiness programmes, and reintegration assistance. These NGOs work in coordination with government departments to provide continuity of care for released individuals, particularly those considered high-risk (Chikadzi et al., 2022:1). For example, before and after being released from prisons in the Johannesburg area, prisoners can receive counselling services from a number of institutions. For a duration

of three months to a year, depending on their circumstances, convicts receive help through weekly counselling sessions. After serving an extended sentence in prison, ex-offenders are envisioned to need assistance navigating the difficult obstacles of reintegrating into mainstream society (Chikadzi et al., 2022:1).

2.12.5 Review of different reintegration programs and interventions

However, even with improved education and participation in more productive programmes, inmates would still have a difficult time finding stable, long-term employment after their release (Duwe, 2018:9). While work release programmes have shown more favourable outcomes, the impact of employment programming on recidivism has been inconsistent (Duwe, 2018:6). This may indicate that rehabilitation cannot be viewed as an institutional process alone, as reintegration success remains dependent on broader community acceptance and social inclusion.

More advocacy is needed for community-based strategies aimed at helping people who have committed sexual offences reintegrate into society. Multiple, diverse, and strong connections to a wide range of other service providers, such as those for mental health, health and disability, culture, spirituality, and social services, education, job, and welfare services, should also be characteristics of desistance and reintegration programmes. Victims and survivors will place a high importance on being kept informed about the release and reintegration procedures of offenders. Specifically, this data would enable victims and survivors to take knowledgeable decisions regarding their own safety (Richards et al., 2020:9)

It is advised that the following approaches can be used to advance the community's and families' potential role in criminal justice interventions on risk management and reintegration:

- creating rehabilitative sexual offenders' initiatives that prioritise future change over a "confessional" approach to past transgressions;
- programmes that look forward rather than backward;

- expanding the scope of work-based opportunities for sex offenders to support the development of positive self-identities, longer-term desistance, and social reintegration; and
- programmes that increase the variety of services available to offenders' families as part of a "reintegrative" release package (McAlinden, 2016).

Instead of concentrating only on punishment, RJ techniques also encourage accountability and attempt to heal the pain that the offence caused. To address the harm, the victim, the offender, and the community come together for these activities, which may include community service, restitution, and mediation. By including all parties in the process and resolving the underlying problems that led to the offence, RJ procedures promote fairness and equity and can help deter future offences and lower recidivism rates (Raza, 2023:4).

Canadian researchers Griffiths, Dandurand and Murdoch, (2007) identify some programmes for the social integration of offenders. While these programmes come from Canada and the United States of America, they provide a framework to compare South African models, structures, principles and current interventions with international standards. It further helps to understand reintegration processes globally, especially since South Africa experiences high rates of recidivism and challenges with successful offender integration.

- **Institutional Programmes**: These programmes are designed to prepare offenders for reintegration into society while they are still incarcerated. They typically include the following:
    - Education
    - Mental health care
    - Substance abuse treatment
    - Job training
    - Counselling
    - Mentoring

Effective programmes usually centre around a full diagnostic and assessment of offenders, addressing dynamic risk factors and needs for successful re-entry.

- **Assistance and Support-Based Reintegration Programmes**: These programmes are focused on providing support to specific groups of offenders and include:
    - The Male Adolescent Program for Positive Sexuality (MAPPS): An alternative to incarceration for youth sex offenders that emphasises rehabilitation and responsibility.
    - The Allegheny County Mental Health Court: Diverts individuals with mental illness from the criminal justice system to treatment.
    - The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Forensic Transition Program: Assists mentally ill offenders transitioning from correctional facilities.
    - Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA): Provides community support to high-risk sex offenders upon their re-entry into society, greatly reducing recidivism.

- **Community-Based Crime Reduction Strategies**: These are integrated approaches that incorporate various community resources and focus on collaboration across agencies. They aim to address public safety through comprehensive strategies, including:
    - The Intensive After Care Programme (IAP) for high-risk young offenders.
    - The Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Initiative (SVORI), which addresses employment, health, and housing needs.

- **UNODOC- Prison-Based Rehabilitation Programmes**:
    - These programs focus on providing rehabilitation while offenders are still incarcerated. They are most effective when based on individual assessments and are culturally sensitive, addressing the specific needs of various offender categories.

- **Reintegration and Aftercare Programmes**:
    - These programmes are designed to assist offenders upon release, aiming to help them adjust and reintegrate successfully into society. Some of these

interventions begin while the offender is still imprisoned to facilitate smoother transitions.

- **Non-Custodial Community-Based Programmes**:
    - These programmes include diversion programmes that allow offenders to take part in educational, mentoring, or restorative justice programmes without formal criminal proceedings. This not only helps avoid the stigmatising effects of being involved with the criminal justice system but also promotes community involvement in the offender's rehabilitation.

- **Specific Programmes Mentioned**:
    - **Cognitive-Behavioural Programmes**: These programmes target the cognitive deficits of offenders and have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism.
    - **Drug Treatment Alternatives**: Programs like the Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison in Brooklyn, New York, allow offenders to be diverted into treatment facilities instead of prison.
    - **Support Programmes for Women**: Initiatives like the Social Rehabilitation Centre for Women and Girls in Russia provide comprehensive services, including legal advice and job training.
    - **Faith-Based Programmes**: For example, the Prisoner Re-entry Toolkit for Faith-Based and Community Organizations in the United States focuses on helping former prisoners reintegrate through community support.

While the programmes outlined by Griffiths et al. (2007), such as SVORI or mental health courts, do not exactly apply to South Africa, similar approaches towards offender rehabilitation and reintegration are embedded in South African policy. For example, the White Paper on Corrections (Department of Correctional Services (DCS), 2005) identifies rehabilitation and societal reintegration as the responsibility of society as a whole. Furthermore, partnerships with civil society and NGOs regarding aftercare programmes for offenders are advocated for by policy. Section 45(1) of the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 explicitly makes provision for purposeful structured programmes that prepare offenders for their release back into the community.

Educational, vocational and/or occupational programmes, as well as psychosocial and offence-focused programmes, support offender rehabilitation and aid in preventing recidivism. Similar practices can be seen through restoration focused justice practices that take place in South Africa. Formalised volunteer accountability and aftercare programmes such as CoSA have yet to be established. CoSA programmes have been found to be successful at reducing recidivism internationally (primarily in Canada) and provide a method of community involvement post-release (Wilson & Fox, 2019). A gap has been noted between systematic recidivism management and available implementation tools. Thus, although South Africa's policy framework aligns broadly with international best practice principles, implementation and structured community involvement remain areas requiring strengthening.

This need for strengthened community involvement is further supported by Visher (2015:65), who argues that the greatest reductions in reoffending are achieved through community-based re-entry models that mobilise families, communities, and positive social networks alongside traditional criminal justice systems, and coordinated, collaborative efforts at various levels are required both within institutions and in the community.

Within correctional facilities, South African prisons offer vocational training programmes to offenders to allow them to gain useful work-related skills that they can apply when looking for work upon release. Some offenders choose to attend these skills programmes which include woodworking, welding, motor mechanics, building and farming. There are also university degree programmes that some offenders are able to attend to reach university qualification through sponsorship programmes. While these programmes occur within prison walls, they are considered to be core elements to reintegration programmes as they allow individuals to better care for themselves and not return to crime (Chikadzi et al., 2022:6).

2.12.6 Success rates and outcomes

Recidivism rates for sexual offences are said to be lower than those for general offenders. However, persons who have committed a sexual offence are perceived as

more dangerous than other offenders. This is even though it can be partially explained by the level of risk management provided to those convicted of sexual offences and the fact that recidivism rates are frequently underestimated because sexual offences are rarely reported or unlikely to be resolved by arrest (Tuschick et al., 2024:1).

2.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The release of sex offenders back into communities comes with a range of ethical implications. Ethics are moral principles or guidelines founded on right and wrong actions or beliefs that may be viewed through obligations or duty and virtuous behaviour, such as justice and promoting social benefits (HedgeNews Africa, 2023:1). Treating sex offenders humanely should be informed by respect for the offenders' autonomy and without prejudice (Serie, De Ruiter, Pleysier & Put, 2023:31). This means that sex offender rehabilitation processes should be consensual, respectful and balanced. However, Ward (2017:213) comments that forensic psychologists face ethical decisions that go beyond the basics of 'can I obtain consent' or 'how do I ensure confidentiality'. They rather deal with questions about moral quandaries. Therefore, this study explores ethical decision-making related to offender rehabilitation that considers breach or fulfilment of what is perceived to be right and just, both by communities fearful of convicts being reintegrated into their areas, and convicts that want rehabilitation informed by the South African guidelines such as the White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2005) that promotes rehabilitating offenders. Finally, my interest in the study is also driven by the belief that offenders are part of our moral community and should be treated as such (Ward, 2015:218) despite communities wanting to be protected from crime.

2.14 ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF SEX OFFENDERS

The reintegration process of sex offenders into communities requires not only structured rehabilitation approaches but also the involvement of professional practitioners equipped to address both the emotional and social dimensions of reintegration. Social workers play an important role in this regard, as they are strategically positioned to facilitate contact with convicted sexual offenders, manage risk, and protect vulnerable populations, particularly children (Robertson, 2013:1). Social work services assist

offenders in resolving their own issues and provide them with social functioning skills. Additionally, offenders receive social work assistance in effectively reintegrating into society. Social work services are implemented through casework, group work, and community work. Similar to psychologists, social workers are tasked with identifying the needs of offenders and making sure they are enrolled in programmes that meet those needs. According to Murhula and Singh (2019), social workers make sure that offenders receive programmes that address issues such as substance addiction, marriage and family, life skills, and sexual offences. Despite the important role social workers play in rehabilitation and reintegration, working with sex offenders remains difficult due to communities' reactions. Social workers may therefore encounter challenges in balancing the rehabilitation and reintegration needs of offenders with concerns relating to community safety, public resistance, and the experiences of victims.

Activities that encourage wellbeing also promote reintegration. Such activities include creative arts which are defined broadly as consisting of cultural activities, sporting activities, music, theatre, and storytelling. International Organization for Migration (IOM) (IOM, 2019). It contributes to social cohesion by building social connections and relationships as well as countering stigma and allowing for personal expression which can aid in healing. These outlets allow offenders to share their transformed worldviews and experiences with others. Although such interventions may support emotional expression and social cohesion, their effectiveness may be limited where communities remain unwilling to accept reintegrated sex offenders.

Social work intervention itself is defined by three foundational professional methods; casework, group work and community development work (Murhula & Singh, 2019:25). These methods allow social workers to target psychosocial issues on both micro and macro levels, enabling individuals to heal emotionally and behaviourally. The success of these interventions may depend not only on therapeutic engagement, but also on broader structural and community factors influencing reintegration opportunities.

Social workers are also instrumental in helping offenders resolve psychological challenges, which, if left unaddressed, may lead to reoffending. As Chikadzi (2017:296) notes, unresolved feelings of regret and inadequacy can increase the likelihood of recidivism. It is therefore crucial for social workers and professionals involved in

rehabilitation and reintegration to understand the barriers that formerly incarcerated individuals face, and the support required for their successful community reintegration. The literature therefore suggests that rehabilitation alone may be insufficient if communities continue to exclude, stigmatise, or reject sex offenders after release.

Community involvement, as well as family involvement when applicable, also impact reintegration results. McAlinden (2016) states that in creating programmes that focus on identity change for sex offenders, moving towards desistance and social inclusion are steps needed in planning for the future. Also needed are programmes for work and offenders' family support to create a complete "reintegrative release package" (McAlinden, 2016). Collaboration is involved in policy creation and application as well. The DCS (2020:23) found it necessary to establish and maintain stronger connections with traditional leaders, community safety forums, and councillors to guide parolees back into their communities with reconciliation. Public awareness initiatives and aftercare offerings supplement the desired outcome of cohesion between parolees and society. So, while community collaboration is widely promoted within reintegration policies, communities may not always share rehabilitative perspectives.

Social workers can be involved with RJ and offer victims opportunities to be heard and contribute to healing. Victims participating in RJ experienced feelings of empowerment and knowledge about the offence as well as healing (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS, 2021). When RJ is offered through collaboration with victim service agencies and other stakeholders, they can create a justice response that is appropriate and centred around those who have been affected by crime (ANROWS, 2021). RJ allows space to include indigenous justice measures and address marginalised groups' needs when being reintegrated, creating more effective results.

Effectively supporting those who are being released from incarceration will require overcoming how society views sexual offenders. Harper and Harris (2017:24) state that when talking about sexual offences, there needs to be well thought out and deliberate communication in order to push for progressive policies and research that will help to eliminate sexual crimes and keep communities safe. The negative light in which the

public can often portray sexual offenders as well as their stigmatisation make it difficult to allow these kinds of policies and support to be effective (Harper & Harris, 2017:23). This reflects the broader tension within reintegration literature between promoting rehabilitation and addressing public demands for punishment, accountability, and community protection.

Social workers focus on building therapeutic alliances with clients from a trauma informed perspective by respectfully joining clients as experts of their own lives while meeting them within their context and cultural framework (Levenson, 2017:109). When workers engage with people from a standpoint of compassion and understanding, they are more likely to establish trusting relationships in which people feel listened to and validated. Levenson (2017:109) suggests that this forms an emotionally corrective experience required for growth and change. Social workers who have been trained within a trauma informed approach recognise the connection between trauma and experiences of poverty and oppression. Instead of pathologizing clients and their behaviours, they focus on clients' strengths and working towards developing healthy coping skills (Levenson, 2017:106). Adopting a trauma informed perspective allows one to see how many behaviours that can be maladaptive are actually protective responses created to ensure survival from the event(s) that happened in the past. These coping skills may be getting in the way of one's ability to function in a healthy way. Social workers can help clients develop new blueprints for how to process their emotions and behave and relate to others (Levenson, 2017:107; Knight, 2015).

Practising cultural humility is another essential element of competent and ethical social work practice. Social workers recognise that all people have multiple intersecting cultural identities that influence their beliefs and actions. They avoid cultural stereotypes by embracing a stance of cultural "humility" and approaching each client with an open, "other-oriented" perspective (Newfoundland & Labrador College of Social Workers, 2022:6). The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASWA) (2017) outlines social workers' responsibility to promote social justice, especially among marginalised and oppressed groups. They promote laws and policies that protect diversity and human rights on a global scale.

Social work itself is founded on advocating human dignity, empowerment and self-actualisation. Social workers fight against social injustice and seek to cultivate communities in which all people – no matter their past or background – can heal and prosper. Their involvement in the rehabilitation and reintegration of sex offenders is crucial, as social workers play an important role in supporting the reintegration of sex offenders by facilitating community engagement, addressing stigma and resistance, and promoting social inclusion within communities.

2.15 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework, according to Vinz (2023), is a fundamental analysis of other theories that acts as a roadmap for creating the arguments utilised in the research process. According to Fouché and Geyer (2021:165), a theoretical framework in research accomplishes three goals: it establishes the researcher's understanding of the theory or theories selected, it identifies which theoretical approach is most pertinent to the research topic, and it acknowledges the relationship between the study and the theoretical approaches.

This study utilised the EST as its underlying theoretical framework, which conceptualised systems as holistic entities interconnected through various elements, encompassing notions such as open and closed systems, entropy, and feedback (Friedman & Allen, 2014:4). The EST centres its attention on the organisation and interconnections of various components, with an emphasis on their collaborative operation (Chikere & Nwoka, 2015:1). Utilising the aforementioned theoretical framework, the present study investigated the dynamics of relationships between individuals who have committed sexual offences and the communities to which they are reintegrated. The primary objective was to explore the different influences exerted by different systems on the attainment of equilibrium in this context. It assists in understanding how community responses may either support or undermine rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

The universe and everything in it are systems, according to Takye (2021:1). They are described as consisting of numerous interconnected components. The human brain, the environment, creatures, and other interconnections between systems around people are examples of complex systems. The total of a complex system is always bigger than the sum of its components. Complex systems are always described in terms of their limits, as being composed of components that cooperate to accomplish a common objective. Boundaries aid in defining the jurisdiction or what should be in and out of complex systems as well as their constrained areas. To be clear, everything that is inside the boundaries is a component of the system, and anything that is outside of them is a part of the system environment. More emphasis is placed on the fact that, generally speaking, systems can display characteristics that result in behaviour that differs from those of its components; these properties and behaviours are known as system-wide or global properties and behaviours, and they describe how the system interacts with or appears to its environment, or how its components behave (Takye, 2021:3). To a certain extent, the organisation and structure of a family dictate what can occur within it. No "normal" family structure exists.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) proposes that an individual's development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems that interact over time (Bronfenbrenner; Flynn & Mathias as cited in Rahman, 2025:550). Bronfenbrenner (1979:3) describes the ecological environment as a set of interconnected structures, similar to Russian dolls, with the individual situated within overlapping environmental systems. These systems include immediate environments such as family, school, and community relationships, which significantly influence individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:6; Rahman, 2025:553).

Applied to this study, EST provides a useful framework for understanding how reintegration is influenced by multiple environmental levels, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The theory therefore assists in exploring how relationships, social structures, and broader societal contexts may shape the reintegration of sex offenders into communities.

- **Microsystem -** The microsystem refers to the immediate environments and relationships in which individuals directly interact, such as family members,

support groups, probation officers, schools, peer groups, and neighbourhoods (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998:1009; Tudge et al., 2009; Tong & An, 2024:6). These close social relationships significantly influence individual experiences and behaviour (Rahman, 2025:553). Within the context of this study, the reactions and support of family members, neighbours, support structures, and community groups may influence the reintegration experiences of sex offenders. Communities often share close social bonds and collective emotional experiences, which may contribute to feelings of fear, anger, mistrust, or resistance when sex offenders return to the community.

- **Mesosystem -** The mesosystem refers to the interaction and relationships between different microsystems in an individual's life, such as relationships between families, service providers, courts, correctional services, and social workers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:40; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998:1009; Tudge et al., 2009; Tong & An, 2024:6). Bronfenbrenner describes the mesosystem as a "system of microsystems" where different social environments may either cooperate or conflict with one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Within the context of this study, collaboration or conflict between families, communities, correctional services, courts, and social workers may influence the successful reintegration of sex offenders into communities.

- **Exo-system -** The exosystem refers to broader social environments that indirectly influence individuals, even when they are not directly involved in them, such as employment opportunities, media representation, and correctional policies (Tudge et al., 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998:1009; Tong & An, 2024:6). Within the context of this study, media portrayals of sexual offences, correctional policies, and limited employment opportunities may shape community perceptions and responses towards the reintegration of sex offenders. Fear of victimisation, public anger, and perceptions of risk may further contribute to community resistance and social exclusion, thereby influencing reintegration outcomes (Rahman, 2025:555).

- **Macrosystem -** The macrosystem refers to broader societal and cultural influences, including social values, beliefs, legislation, and public attitudes that shape individual experiences (Rahman, 2025:556; Habermas, 1979). Within the context of this study, the macrosystem includes cultural attitudes towards sex offenders, societal stigma, and legislation such as the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007). These broader societal beliefs and legal frameworks may influence how communities perceive and respond to the reintegration of sex offenders, either supporting or undermining social acceptance and reintegration efforts.

- **Chronosystem -** Historical changes in legal responses and rehabilitation strategies: The idea of time is part of the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:1644). This encompasses not only the individual's ageing and maturation but also the time frame during which they live and develop (Crawford, 2020:2). Reintegration of sexual offenders is a terrible, unforgettable event that leaves scars on victims, families, and the community as a whole. The community becomes unsafe as a result.

This study recognised that the reintegration of offenders can potentially upset the overall societal equilibrium by introducing disturbances within the system. Therefore, the utilisation of EST provided a comprehensive perspective on all interconnected systems, thereby improving understanding and directing social work interventions within the framework of sex offender reintegration. The reintegration process may give rise to potential conflicts and obstacles that can have an influence on the unity and safety of the community.

2.16 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Two critically explored literature relating to the rehabilitation and reintegration of sex offenders into communities, with specific attention to community perceptions, stigma, reintegration barriers, and rehabilitation processes within the South African context. The chapter further examined legislative and policy frameworks, the role of social work interventions, and the influence of societal attitudes on reintegration

outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework to explain how individual, familial, community, and broader societal systems interact to influence reintegration processes. Overall, the literature highlights that successful reintegration remains a complex process influenced by rehabilitation efforts, community acceptance, and broader social responses towards sex offenders.

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CHAPTER THREE: APPLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the researcher's methodological journey, outlining how the study was designed, conducted and assessed for rigour. After introducing the chosen research methodology and qualitative research approach, the rationale for selecting an exploratory, descriptive and contextual design is provided, followed by a description of practical research strategies used to operationalise the study. This includes descriptions of the study setting and population, sampling strategy (including inclusion and exclusion criteria), sample size considerations and data saturation, as well as gaining entry via gatekeepers. Furthermore, preparation for and processes of data collection are explained (such as pilot testing, semi-structured interviews and the researcher's interviewing role and skills). This is followed by a detailed description of how interview data were analysed, before concluding with a discussion of how trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability The chapter concludes with describing the ethical considerations relevant to sensitive qualitative inquiry; these included non-maleficence, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, beneficence, data management, and debriefing.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology can be defined as the bridge between researchers' philosophical assumptions and the choices they make while conducting their research. It can be viewed as a roadmap that outlines how researchers will act, from the beginning of a study to drawing conclusions from their results. It therefore plays a critical role in the research process, since methodology refers to the procedures used by the researchers to collect, analyse, describe and explain their research findings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, cited in Maree, 2016:51; Bailey, 2018:17). It does not refer to a particular

method used in research. Instead, research methodology ensures consistency in how research is planned and executed.

Methodology can also describe the specific steps taken by the researcher to complete the research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015:1773). These steps often include the researcher's choice of research approach and design, population and sampling, and how they will collect and analyse their data. Because of these steps, research methodology allows researchers to evaluate how valid and reliable a study is, and to ensure that research is trustworthy. The research approach and research design used for the study are discussed below.

3.2.1 The research approach

Research approaches can be defined as concepts and methods that apply to studies ranging from basic philosophical assumptions through to methods of data gathering, data analysis and interpretation. An approach has decision points that align to form a logical path for reasoning throughout the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:3; Singleton & Straits, 2017:3). Therefore, research approaches offer direction for studies that are reasonable.

There are three research approaches typically used in the social sciences, namely, the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:3; Roberts-Holmes, 2018:82). These approaches vary depending on how research problems are formulated and what data are to be collected, as well as how responses are captured and analysed (Tenny, Brannan & Brannan, 2022). The quantitative research approach involves measurement and statistics by quantifying data. The qualitative approach is concerned with the meaning and descriptions of the matter being researched. Mixed methods offer aspects of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Research approaches are said to follow a post-positivist tactic with most research falling into one of the three approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:8).

A search for theory strives to develop knowledge through building, extending or refuting concepts. All research approaches demonstrate a logical procedure for data collection,

analysis and distribution of research findings when studying a phenomenon (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022:14). Each approach allows for specific strategies to be applied, which consist of techniques that suggest how data will be gathered, analysed, reasoned, and interpreted throughout the study. After taking cognisance of the basic nature of the three approaches, the motivation for using the qualitative approach in this study is discussed below.

3.2.1.1 Quantitative approach

In a quantitative study, researchers employ theory to explain or forecast how the study's variables relate to one another. Researchers present their ideas in a variety of forms, including a set of hypotheses, if-then logic statements, or visual representations. Ideas can have a broad or narrow scope. Applying theories establishing knowledge and comprehension of various assumptions developed in a study is the goal of quantitative research. As a result, there is a cycle of successive stages of hypothesis generation, creativity, discipline, and patience during the planning and designing phases (Ghanad, 2023:2794).

3.2.1.2 Mixed method approach

A mixed-methods approach is a distinct research methodology, through which theory can be applied deductively, in testing and validity of quantitative theories, or applying them inductively as in an emerging qualitative pattern or theory. There are distinctive ways that theory is integrated into a mixed-methods study. Researchers gather, examine, evaluate and utilise a variety of mixed methods strategies to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A mixed-methodologies research design contains its own philosophical presumptions and methods of inquiry, (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021:27; Fetters, 2016).). This allows for the meaningful explanation of research issues through the interweaving of qualitative and quantitative data. Additionally, it provides methodological flexibility, a logical foundation, and a thorough comprehension of smaller examples (Maxwell, 2016).

3.2.1.3 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research was employed in the study because it allowed for an investigation of participants' understanding of experiences as well as the social context surrounding these experiences. Qualitative methods allow for discovery about what meanings people ascribe to their actions, reasons why they behave in certain ways, and motivations. Providing descriptions, insights, and ideas about social situations, qualitative research takes the context of human experience into consideration (Lim, 2024:201). This research approach is distinct from the others because of its ability to reflect social processes and acknowledge multiple views and ways of living.
Qualitative research also has enormous capacity for contributing towards access, equity, inclusion, and social justice because research questions can dig deep into both dominant and marginalised voices. Because qualitative methods focus on exploring particular things in specific settings, this type of enquiry allows the researcher to find patterns, connect past and social factors to experiences, and construct possible understandings of social problems (McAloney & Long, 2021; Nunes, Silva, Pereira & Costa, 2023:20). Qualitative methods also allow for open-ended "how" and "why" questions, which may lead to further exploration of the participants' answers. Asking participants questions and listening carefully to their responses allows the researcher to probe for more information and understand participants based on their way of thinking and how they communicate (Oranga & Matere, 2023:7).

In addition, qualitative research can help measure subjective and hard-to-measure factors that impact people, such as perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and decision-making (Russell, Jones, Smith, Brown & Taylor, 2019). Additionally, qualitative research can be used to describe situations and to understand particular tasks or processes (Hameed, 2024:7). Finally, qualitative research is used as an exploratory technique that involves the researcher being part of the process by interacting with the participants as they live, through or talking about their experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015:4). Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because the topic focused on lived experiences within a social context. The researcher wished to understand how participants interpreted and felt about sex offenders re-entering society.

3.2.2 Research design

The research design can be defined as a blueprint which details the overall approach being used in carrying out the research study. It is essentially a specific plan that indicates the aims of the study, the procedures of collecting and analysing information, time allocated for different phases, resources, roles and responsibilities, as well as the expected findings (Ansari, Khan, & Malik, 2022:1132). Research design thus refers to the central framework that guides every aspect of the research process and keeps it focused. It helps to ensure consistency between the research problem, methodologies employed, and conclusions drawn by acting as something against which everything else can be measured.

Research design is important because it forces the researcher to take an organised and systematic approach to the study. Creating benchmarks and specific procedures before embarking on research allows for greater efficiency and rigor during implementation. By taking time to plan every step of a study in advance, there is greater opportunity to account for issues that may arise and limit the study's effectiveness (Thakur, 2021). For these reasons, having a sound research design ensures that one's research will be deliberate and logical.

The research design also determines what kind of study one is conducting. This can include the type of study (descriptive, correlational, experimental, semi-experimental, review, meta-analytic), any sub-types applied (a descriptive study can be a longitudinal case study), as well as the research problem, hypothesis if applicable, variables, and data collection and analysis methods (Creswell, 2014; Thakur, 2021). The research design used in this study was explorative, descriptive, and contextual. These designs are discussed below.

3.2.2.1 Exploratory research

Exploratory research is used to get an improved impression of what is trendy and in what way it might be researched (Blaikie & Priest, 2019:81). The researcher understood exploratory research as a determined inquisitiveness to discover mysteries about the

phenomenon studied. An explorative research design was used in this research to explore the Mamelodi community's perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community.

3.2.2.2 Descriptive research

Descriptive research aims to present a perfect account of the phenomenon researched, the individualities in some demographic classifications or groups, the outlines of associations in some social context, or in a specific time (Blaikie & Priest, 2019:81). According to Davies (2021), a descriptive qualitative study is a thorough account of a particular circumstance or situations using observations, interviews, and documentary evaluation. It is a description of things exactly as they are. The following enquiries should be investigated: How is this programme put into practice? What difficulties do people encounter? What do people think? Instead of imposing the researcher's interpretation, qualitative research aims to comprehend the meaning that participants assign to the research problem and their experiences about it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:182). In this research, the researcher described the Mamelodi community's perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community.

3.2.2.3 Contextual research

The best way to understand a phenomenon is to view it in its context (Acharyya & Bhattacharya, 2020:21). Contextual research design is thus a "user-centred design process constructed upon in-depth arena research to drive ground-breaking design" (Holtzblatt & Beyer 2017:3). In qualitative research information is collected in the participants' everyday surroundings, thus within its general context (Grey, 2018:163). The researcher intended to discover the perspectives and experiences of the Mamelodi community on sex offenders' reintegration into community. Using this design assisted the researcher to discover the contextual factors linked to the topic to attain a holistic picture of the phenomenon.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods are the techniques or tools used by a researcher to gather data systematically and appropriately (Maree, 2016:74). This involves how the researcher

approaches and locates the population of interest, selects the sample and gathers information that suits the purpose of the study being conducted (Cropley, 2022). The methods used for this depend on the problem identified for the research and the way in which information will be collected, processed and analysed. This can also include how sampling was done, including the demographics, pilot study, processing of information, and validation of the data. These ensure validity and reliability of results.

Before dealing with the data collection and the method of data analysis the focus falls on the study setting, study population, sampling, sample size and data saturation, gaining entry to the participants, preparation for data collection, and pilot testing.

3.3.1 Study setting

'Meaning making' is the primary emphasis of qualitative research, and participants are observed in their natural environments (Lim, 2024). The physical, social, and cultural location where the researcher carries out the study might be considered the research context or study setting and forms a crucial part of a research investigation (Majid, 2018:3). How the research study is conducted may be influenced by the type, context, environment, and logistics of the study setting. Before submitting a study for its ethics review and starting data collecting, researchers should document the features, events, meetings, and other aspects of a study setting. By observing a study setting before to the commencement of data collection, researchers might anticipate and prepare for any practical difficulties that may arise from the structure, organisation, or design of the study environment (Majid, 2018:3). In qualitative research, the research setting indicates the place of the study that is closely associated with the predetermined research emphasis. The environment, location, or region where the researcher intends to conduct the study is known as the research setting.

This study was carried out in a South African township (Mamelodi) which has dense population patterns, limited economic and employment options, and strong social networks which are rooted in the community. Mamelodi is a typical township created by the apartheid regime in 1953 when 16 houses were built on Vlakfontein farm, 20 km east of Pretoria, for black people under the Group Areas Act 41 of 1950 (Mohale, 2025).

The township covers a land area of approximately 25 square kilometers with an estimated population of close to a million people (Darkey & Visagie, 2013). Mamelodi is bordered by informal settlements (see Figure 3-1: Map of Mamelodi).

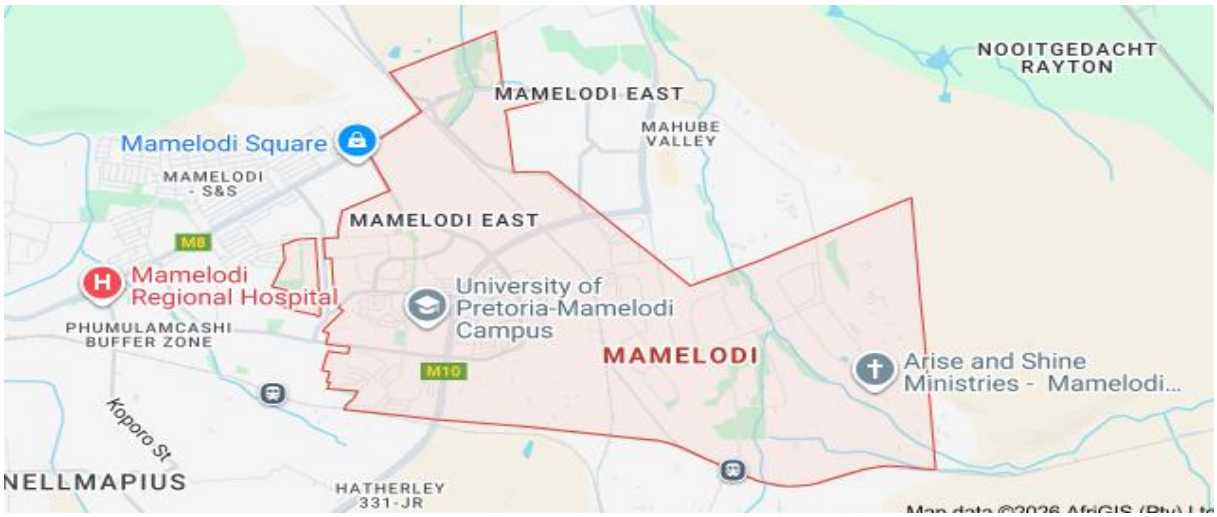

Figure 3-1 Google Map of Mamelodi

Formal and informal housing, high unemployment, and limited access to psychological and rehabilitative treatments are all common characteristics of townships like Mamelodi. Close-knit neighbourhood structures, cultural norms, and community expectations all form the social milieu and have an impact on how people who are returning from prison are viewed and assisted (South African History Online (SAHO), 2019).

This setting was chosen because it reflects the real-world situation where reintegration issues are most apparent and where to sex offenders frequently return after being released. A complicated social landscape characterised by stigmatisation, safety concerns, scarce resources, and differing degrees of community acceptance can be found in township settings. Because of these characteristics, it is a suitable and pertinent environment for examining the perspectives of local support systems, families, and community members as well as the lived experiences of sexual offenders during reintegration, not forgetting the victims and their families.

3.3.2 Study Population

To ensure research findings' validity, reliability, and applicability one must understand the research population and sample (Ahmad, Alias, & Abdul Razak, 2023:19). Population elements are single members or components of a populace; they can be things like societies, social activities, social circumstances, gender or age groups. The researcher can describe population in whatsoever way that is considered suitable to answer the research question(s) (Blaikie & Priest, 2019:166). Population is thus a cluster of people or things that have the same characteristics. Population for a study is further described as the set (usually of people) on which assumptions can be drawn for the study (Ahmad et al., 2023:20-21). It is essential to illuminate the procedural meaning of *population* and *sample.* For the sampling method to be applied, it is essential to describe the targeted unit of analysis from which the sample will be drawn. The members of a study population therefore have something in common. It might be found in a certain area or share the same quality and have a collective interest.

The population for this study comprises community members of mixed races, both male and female from age of thirty-five to sixty years' old residing in Mamelodi Township. Pretoria. This age category was selected based on Eriksons' (1982) view that middle adulthood (age 35-65) is the time when adults can expect to "be in charge". The main task is to perpetuate culture and transmit values of the culture through the family and working to establish a stable environment. In this age bracket individuals tend to be involved in the community. Erikson (1982) indicates that strength comes through care of others and production of something that contributes to the betterment of society. It is thus this age that is concerned about keeping their children and the community safe (Tyler 2020).

According to Aktu and İlhan (2017:1383), early adulthood is one of the significant turning points in a person's lifetime development, as outlined in Levinson's theory. One's first responsibility at this time is to assess one's current structure, look for ways to alter one's social interactions and self-representation, and express one's basic desires for one's next life structure. Early adulthood, which spans the ages of 18 to 35, is a time when people are beginning to explore their desires and engage with others as adults (Erikson,

1963). They successfully negotiate socialisation and community events. As part of the community, they would also want to engage in a safe environment as they discover life and try to find their feet without fear and anxiety in their own community. This is the time they also equip themselves through engagement with those who have experience and are burning with desire to acquire knowledge from the experts.

The population that this study is aimed at included the community members based in Mamelodi Township, located in Pretoria. To study the whole population would be challenging in terms of time and costs. With limited resources, sampling can lessen the cost of the study and increase the extensiveness of knowledge (Blaikie & Priest, 2019:167). Therefore, a sample has been drawn and selected from members from the community who represented the research population.

3.3.3 Sampling

A sample is defined as a small part of the populace from which participants are chosen by the researcher for the study (Ahmad et al., 2023:21). Fain (2017:134) affirms this, stating that sampling is the process of choosing participants for a study so that they accurately reflect the larger group from which they are selected. The design task of deciding which elements in the population will be chosen and how these elements will be chosen for the sample is described as sampling (Loseke, 2017:117). Sampling is used to designate a segment from a greater populace in a manner that will represent the population from which it was drawn (Bailey, 2018:119).

In the process of determining the sample, the researcher can utilise two possible forms of sampling, probability and non-probability sampling method as outlined in Figure 3-2 and discussed below (Babbie & Mouton 2016:166; Taherdoost, 2016:20).

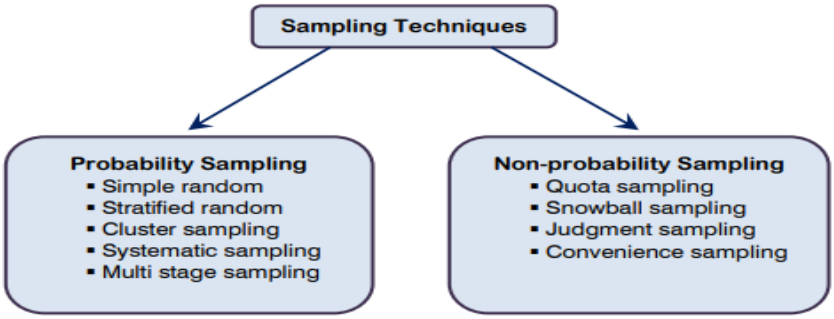

FIGURE I2: SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Figure 3-2 Types of sampling techniques (Taherdoost, 2016:20)

3.3.3.1 Probability sampling

Probability sampling denotes that every participant in the population has an equal or same chance of being included in the sample. This type of sampling is appropriate for certain research purposes. When researchers need the exact, arithmetical narrative of large inhabitants, for example the percentage of population of single parents, they turn to probability sampling. All substantial scale surveys use probability-sampling scales (Taherdoost, 2016:20).

Probability sampling is used mainly to enable the generalisation of outcomes of the study. Therefore, probability sampling is generally not used in qualitative research because it aims for statistical representativeness and generalisability. Probability sampling also tends not to be used when the number of people in a setting is large and for determining times and places for observing statistical simplification is not the area of the field researchers (Bailey, 2018:119). Social research is thus frequently conducted in circumstances that do not allow the kinds of probability sampling used in large-scale social surveys (Taherdoost, 2016:20).

3.3.3.2 Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling on the other hand is when the possibility of counting each component of the populace in a sample is indefinite. In this instance, it is not likely to regulate the possibility of all representative elements of the population being present in

the sample. Some elements might be excluded (Taherdoost, 2016:22). The non-probability sampling techniques are shown in **Figure 3-3** and discussed below:

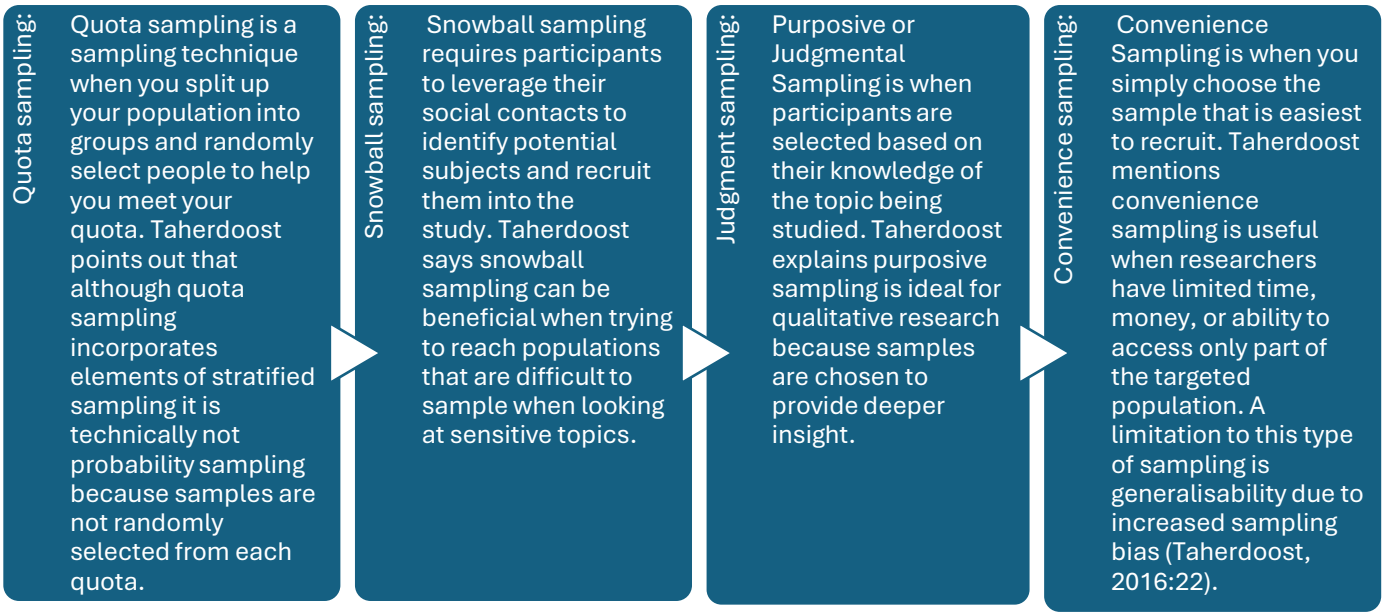

Figure 3-3 Non-probability sampling techniques

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used purposive or judgmental sampling as a non-probability sampling technique. The aim of purposive sampling is to sample cases/ participants in a planned way, so that those sampled are appropriate to the research queries that are posed. It is rare for a researcher to simply decide to sample to confirm a decent arrangement of diversity in the resulting sample, so that the sample might have unique memberships in terms of key characteristics that are appropriate to the research. Because it is a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling does not permit the researcher to simplify the population (Bryman, 2016:323). Sometimes selecting a sample based on the knowledge of the population, its elements, and purpose of the study is applicable. This form of sampling is called purposive (or judgmental sampling) (Taherdoost, 2016:23). Finding the best examples for the study yields the best data, which is the foundation of purposeful sampling. The points sampled directly influence research findings (Leavy, 2017: 79).

Selecting individuals who have an experience of the phenomenon that the researcher wants to explore is essential (Creswell, 2016:110). In purposive sampling, researchers

select personalities and locations purposefully to study or apprehend the essential phenomenon. It enables the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth insights from individuals who have direct experience of the issue being studied. It helps in getting supreme data by choosing the experts or people who probably have experience in the particular field and research topic as participants in the research. It sanctions the researcher to target individual personalities or occasions that would be insightful for the study (Taherdoost, 2016:23). Purposive sampling is profitable when the researcher previously has knowledge about something and intentionally chooses specific research units as they are seen as occurrences that are expected to produce the utmost valued data. It is nominated with a comprehensive determination in mind, and that purpose reproduces the certain qualities of the individuals or occasions chosen and their significance to the topic of the study (Casteel & Bridier, 2021:350; Denscombe, 2014:41). Although a purposive sample is not a random sample, it is not a convenient sample either. The researcher thus purposefully selects participants based on some specific criteria that are referred to as essential (Casteel & Bridier, 2021:350).

Determining inclusion and exclusion criteria for study participants is an essential and vital tactic when designing high-quality research protocols (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). Inclusion criteria are defined as the key features of the target population that the investigators will use to answer their research question (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The criteria for inclusion were signified in the sample in order to simplify the practises across all diversity components. The criteria for exclusion were formulated to identify specific characteristics that disqualify potential participants from the study. The following criteria for inclusion and exclusion were specified:

- **Inclusion criteria**

The inclusion criteria included the participants who were willing to participate in the study (volunteers), and who resided in Mamelodi. The participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 60 years old. The researcher recruited participants who were able to express themselves in English and isiXhosa language. The researcher is fluent in both languages but also approached another social worker who is fluent in both English and isiXhosa as well, to translate to English to avoid biasness and to ensure the correct

translation. This was however not utilised at the end as all participants communicated in English. The criteria for inclusion as participants in this study are listed as follows:

- Persons who were willing to participate voluntary in the study.
- Persons residing in Mamelodi Township for at least two years.
- Persons in the age group 18 to 60 years.
- Persons able to express themselves in English and isiXhosa.

- **Exclusion criteria**

The following criteria excluded individuals from participation:

- Persons under the age of eighteen years and older than sixty years.
- Persons who do not reside in Mamelodi.
- Persons who were not willing to participate in the study.
- Persons who could not express themselves in English and/or isiXhosa language.

When recruiting participants for the study, in general it is vital to determine the perfect size of the sample required for the study (Singleton & Straits, 2017:71). However, in qualitative research the principle of data saturation is utilised to determine the size of the sample. Data saturation indicates when a sample is large enough and adequate for the investigated phenomenon, that is, when the data sufficiently describe the variation, complexity, and subtleties of the participants in relation to the phenomenon researched, and thus demonstrates content validity (Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024). Data saturation occurs in interviews when the researcher identifies that similar comments are made repetitively without ant new information being provided. It is then time to stop accumulating information and start scrutinising what has been previously gathered (Grady as cited by Sanders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield et al., 2017:5). When the data gathered continue to give similar description pointing to specific same direction and nothing new emerges, interviews are suspended. In this research, data saturation was reached after interviewing 15 participants.

3.3.4 Gaining entry and collecting the data

After establishing the site and the study population for the research, the researcher had to seek authorisation to access the research environment, since research sites are

seldom openly accessible (Owen, Alegro & Connor, 2015:2). The necessary cooperation and assistance had to be obtained from the relevant gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are typically individuals or organisations that control entry into the research field. The role of gatekeepers is significant since they directly affect how much access the researcher will have to possible participants and what sorts of data will be available (Bailey, 2018:74). Especially in situations where trust may initially be lower, obtaining the assistance of a community champion/ gatekeeper becomes really important. This usually is someone who comes from within the community concerned and has established trusting relationships with other persons there (Liamputtong, 2019:93). The gatekeepers for this study were the members of the ward committee of Mamelodi Township, the volunteer-based 10 member bodies designed to enhance public participation as referred by the ward councillor at City of Tshwane.

The researcher approached the ward committee and submitted a request to carry out the research in their ward. During this session, the researcher clarified why the study was being conducted, explained the research process, and ensured that ethical measures were in place to protect participants, and requested permission to conduct the study (refer to Addendum B). Subsequently, the researcher contacted a community development worker in Mamelodi and asked if the researcher could make a presentation to community members during one of their weekly virtual meetings which were held virtually at the time due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) regulations.

At this occasion the researcher explained the details of the study to the potential participants and made it clear that their participation in the study was voluntary. The researcher then provided information letters and consent forms to those who wished to participate (refer to Addendum C). The participants were told that they did not have to participate in the study if they did not want to and that they were free to withdraw at any time, even if they had agreed to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were again assured to participants. Lastly, the participants were told that identifying information would not be connected to their responses.

After completing a short biographical form for each prospective participant, they were provided with the questions listed in the interview guide ahead of time, for them to

prepare for the interview. Interviews were scheduled with the individual participants at a time and place convenient for them. One-on-one interviews were then conducted with the participants through Microsoft Teams. Participants' consent to record the interviews, was obtained and recorded through the platform.

3.3.5 Preparation for data collection

Qualitative interviewing should be approached with the necessary preparation and planning for using interview and interpersonal skills that respect ethical standards throughout the process (Chand, 2025:305). The interviewer prepared for data collection by standardising processes while upholding quality research criteria regarding safety, ethics and rigour. Taherdoost (2021:21) offers ways in which researchers can prepare for collecting the qualitative data. One suggestion is identifying target populations that fit the purpose of the study. In addition, information regarding the research concept and background was shared with prospective participants to familiarise them with the focus of the study. This preparatory process enabled participants to develop an initial understanding of the topic prior to engaging in the research.

Semi-structured interview questions were standardised, shared with interviewees before the interviews to allow time to reflect on them, and required respondents to elaborate on their answers during interviews rather than engage in a simple question-and-answer session to collect more in-depth information. Interviewees were asked to clarify their thoughts and during the interviews the interviewer reiterated in her own words the information to be gathered during the interviews. The data collection protocol was impacted by the situation caused by COVID-19. Multiple facets of life have been disrupted by the unpredictability of COVID-19 which has had "far-reaching consequences" for research designs (Zeiger & Mason, 2020:2).

Within the South African context, strict social distancing measures were implemented to limit community transmission, as guided by the Social Behavioural Education and Research Ethics Committee (REC: SBE) (Hansen, 2020:1). As a result, physical contact between the researcher and participants was not permitted. To ensure the safety of all

parties, data collection was conducted through virtual interviews using platforms such as Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp calls.

Ethical considerations formed a central component of the data collection preparation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review committee of the University of South Africa prior to the commencement of fieldwork. As already stated, participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained through an information letter and consent form outlining participants' rights. These rights included the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, the right to confidentiality and anonymity, and information regarding potential risks and benefits associated with participation (Creswell, 2016:106). Given that recruitment occurred virtually, consent forms were emailed to participants, who signed and returned them electronically. Permission to conduct the study and collect data was also obtained from the Mamelodi ward committee.

Online interviews also required technical preparation. The researcher became familiarised with the online platforms used for data collection and practised conducting interviews online until she felt comfortable with it. Harerimana, Wicking, Biedermann and Yates (2024) note that qualitative interviewing is a technique-driven exercise that requires conceptual and practical preparations before and during data collection. Conceptual preparation includes adapting the data collection method to practical constraints such as those presented by COVID-19, while practical preparation included becoming competent with online interviewing software. These preparations allowed the researcher to interview participants professionally and ensured that she was able to pay close attention to their answers and collect quality data.

Planning and preparation also extend to maintaining reflexivity, ethical principles and methodological rigour during qualitative interviews (McGrath et al., 2018). Interviews are appropriate to use when wanting to better understand the experiences of research participants and how they make sense of their social world(s), as opposed to research that aims to make general claims about human behaviour, as interview data tends to lack breadth for large-scale generalisations. As interviews can be unpredictable,

planning for practicalities like interview location, recording techniques and note-taking is vital, but so is reflexivity and reflection during and after interviews has taken place.

Before beginning interviews, the researcher created an interview guide. Semi-structured interviews guided by this interview guide with open-ended questions were appropriate because they were prepared ahead of time and implemented uniformly across all participants which allows for better comparison. Attentive listening is made possible by open-ended enquiries (Creswell, 2014:8) and open-ended questions allow participants the opportunity to share their thoughts freely, but they also allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions if clarification is needed on something said (Taherdoost, 2021:18–19). The following elements were included in the interview guide (Creswell, 2014:194):

- A heading followed by the names of the interviewer and interviewee, date, and location). These interview protocols are consistent from one interview to the next.
- An "icebreaker," which is followed by follow-up questions and a summary of the responses. Additionally, this could be a chance to find out more details or recommend potential subjects who have encountered the phenomenon being studied.
- Enquiring queries that can serve as a forum for individual elaboration. A space to jot down and document answers in between questions.
- At the conclusion of the interview, an acknowledgement and statement of gratitude are addressed to the participant for the time and effort put into the research project.

3.3.6 Pilot testing

‘Pilot testing’, also referred to as ‘pre-testing’, is a small-scale experimental course and assessment of the research tool (Singleton & Straits, 2017:158). A pilot test is an initial evaluation of the research questions to ascertain whether they function properly and will yield the intended outcomes (Johnson & Christensen, 2017:183). Conservative intelligence suggests that pre-testing is not done for unearthing errors but to help the researcher with extra guidance on how to use the research instrument and interview skills. The researcher arranged a pilot test using the interview guide with two individuals

who matched the inclusion criteria of the study. The same skills used in the method of collecting data were employed in the pilot testing (see section 3.4.2).

The researcher interviewed two people excluded in the final sample to test the feasibility of the interview guide and the data collection method. These participants also adhered to the basic selection criteria for participants and modifications were made to the interview guide, as necessary. The feedback obtained was used to re-align the data instrument as well as the researchers' skills where needed. The information obtained during these interviews was not included in the data obtained from the other participants.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection method refers to the step in which the researcher determines the broad shape of what needs to be done and creates a research instrument to accomplish what needs to be known (Bryman, 2016:10). The chosen data collection methods should be based on their capacity to best meet the research goal and answer the research questions (Leavy, 2017: 93–94). Creswell and Creswell (2018:303) state that interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials are primary sources of data collection strategies, as shown in Figure 3-4. These four strategies can be used to collect rich, contextualised data and meanings typical of qualitative studies:

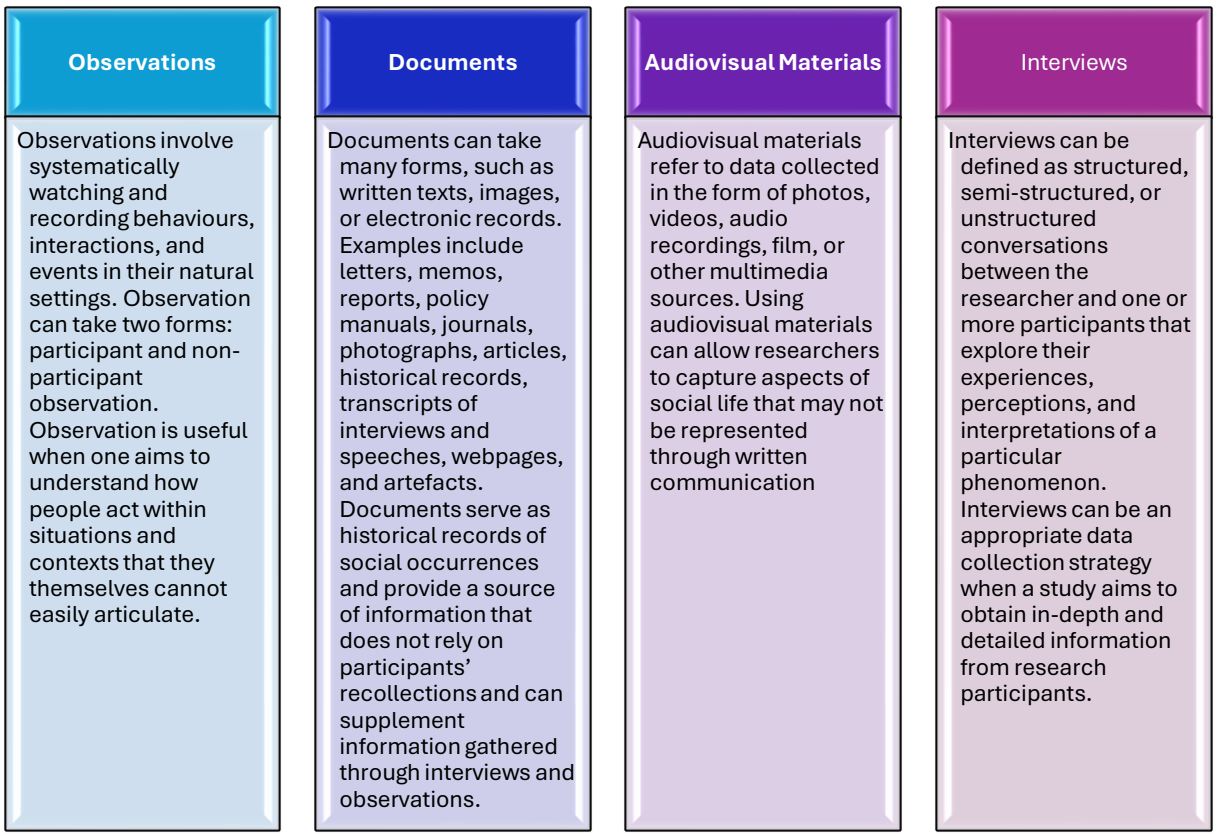

Figure 3-4 Data collection methods (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018:303)

The conducting of semi-structured interviews as the chosen method to obtain data from the participants and the role of the researcher and interviewing skills used entailed the following:

3.4.1 Semi-structured interview as the chosen method

Conducting semi-structured interviews, aided with an interview guide that included open-ended questions was chosen as the data collection method for the study. Interviews as a data collection technique consist of a sequence of questions centred on the research topic to be answered by research participants and align with the methodological approach (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022:2; McGrath et al., 2018). According to McGrath et al. (2018) interviews offer researchers opportunities to explore, in an in-depth manner, unique experiences of the interviewees. These interviews with participants can be done either telephonically/ electronically or face-to-face.

In the social sciences, conducting semi-structured interviews is a popular research method. It is described as an exploratory interview, which is usually centred on the primary subject that offers a general pattern and is based on a guide ((Hyman, Cobb, Feldman, Hart & Stember; Magaldi & Berler, 2020). In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews enable researchers to obtain detailed information and supporting data from interview subjects while carefully taking the study's objective into consideration (Liamputtong, 2017:17; Magaldi & Berler, 2020; Ruslin, Rahman, Sulaiman, & Noor, 2022:22). Semi-structured interviews consist of a series of open-ended questions depending on the topics the researcher desires to cover, allowing both parties to explore a variety of themes in more depth. They are also adaptable and flexible (Liamputtong, 2017:18). However, because the semi-structured interview's direction is completely controlled, it differs from the unstructured interview's looseness in terms of flexibility and adaptation (Ruslin et al., 2022:22). When researchers or interviewers require more information, they can continue the dialogue using the pre-prepared questions (Taherdoost, 2021). However, the interviewers ask questions based on the directives. These open-ended or unstructured interviews often take the form of a conversation with the purpose that the researcher explores the opinions, viewpoints, principles and outlooks of the participants about definite events and phenomena (Maree, 2016:93).

Data were collected for this study from the 30 June 2021 to September 2022, which was during the COVID-19 period. Considering the restrictions set during the COVID-19 lockdowns and the prevention measures of infection risks of COVID-19 set by the government at the time (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Republic of South Africa, 2020), data were collected remotely via a secured encrypted server Microsoft (MS) Teams platform. Ethical clearance approval allowed data collectors to remain distant to avoid overcrowding and physical interaction. Interviews conducted virtually had cost requirement of participants using mobile data. They were then reimbursed for this cost. based on data costs at a fixed Vodacom rate. Interviewees were informed about the reimbursement after recruitment measures to limit any pressures of expectancy from participants.

In qualitative research, questions are asked rather than posing hypotheses. Using a hypothesis would stereotypically accept the possibility of investigation, but in qualitative research, questions are kept as open-ended as possible so that several perspectives can be elicited from participants (Creswell 2016:97).

The following questions comprising the interview guide (Addendum I), were asked of the participants:

- **Biographical questions**
  - How old are you?
  - Where do you reside?
  - For how many years have you been residing there?
  - What is your preferred language for communication?
  - What is your highest qualification?

- **Topical questions**
  - What do you understand about sexual violence?
  - How does sexual violence affect your community?
  - According to you, how do community members react or respond towards sex offenders returning to the community after having served their sentences?
  - What perceptions do you have about sex offenders returning to the community after serving their sentence?
  - By whom should the occurrence of sexual violence be managed?
  - How does the community react when sex offenders are arrested?
  - What do you understand as the reintegration of offenders?
  - What is your view on reintegration of sexual offenders within your community?
  - How do you think can social workers support the community members in this regard

3.4.2 Role of the researcher and interviewing skills

Interviews are one of the most popular qualitative data collection methods — and for good measure. They tend to be a familiar, fast, and generally reasonable tool to examine subjective experiences and attitudes (Demirci, 2024:21) involving a great deal of skill and involvement. In conducting the qualitative research interviews, the interviewer applied interviewing skills that have an important influence on the comprehensiveness and complexity of the information provided by the participants.

When conducting interviews, it is important to work at building trust and respect. Participants are more likely to provide rich data when they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences (McGrath et al., 2018). Interviewers should be reflexive and conscious of the inherent power imbalance that exists as in co-constructing knowledge with participants. Interviewing skills such as active listening, well-placed probes, and going with the flow are important when interviewing while still holding on to a sense of direction and focus on the overall goals of the study. Interviewing also demands strong consideration of ethics. This includes, but is not limited to, allowing participants to have a voice and control, guaranteeing confidentiality, and monitoring emotional reactions. Using open-ended questions rather than closed ones is fundamental. This includes attentive listening and possibly some taking of notes during the initial narrative to be able to follow up themes in a narrative way. The follow-up questions should be as open as possible (Panyasai & Ambele, 2025:578)

The listening skill is fundamental to receiving messages efficiently. It involves taking what another person articulates and having a psychological connection with the person who is not speaking, Listening is a language proficiency. It involves a desire to understand what another individual is saying with an attitude of admiration and recognition (Tyagi, 2013:1). Listening to participants when they respond to enquiries or express opinions about a good or a service is a component of the qualitative research approach. Even if they hold differing opinions, researchers typically have good listening skills and show an interest in what others have to say. Responding to remarks and enquiries, treating the other person with dignity, and demonstrating curiosity are all examples of good listening techniques (Indeed Editorial Team, 2025). According to

Kirubakaran (2020), active listening involves paying attention to what is being said and vocally confirming that you understand. Kabir (2017:19) points out that despite saying very little, the listener shows genuineness, acceptance, and empathy. The purpose of the listener's speech is to ascertain whether one, two, or twenty statements have been accurately heard and comprehended. In the process, the researcher should not only listen attentively, but must also observe the non-verbal messages, body posture and facial expressions.

Probing is described as meticulous and detailed in investigation retaining or exhibiting insights of great accuracy and sensitivity. The keenness to explore and bring the concealed to light, forms the basic necessary attribute to kindle probing skills. In individuals, probing functions as a strategy to access knowledge and wisdom. The inquisitiveness to probe into an issue can be conducted and focused through suitable questions (Robinson, 2023:384). In order to get rich, in-depth information from participants in research interviews, effective applying probing techniques are essential. By using verbal cues to elucidate, elaborate, demonstrate, or explain a previous response to an interview question that the participant has already provided, probing has access to this additional level of depth and information. Because it facilitates the collection of rich, in-depth, and thorough information, probing has been acknowledged in literature as a crucial component of the research interview process (Robinson, 2023:382). Probes are enquiries for more details regarding the participant's prior response (Robinson, 2023:382). Probing entails the interviewer making statements and asking questions that allow the participant to delve further into any pertinent aspect of his or her life. Statements, enquiries, requests, single words or phrases, and nonverbal cues are all examples of probes. In general, because they elicit more information, probing questions frequently start with "What" or "How." "Do you" or "Are you" questions which encourage introspection (Kabir, 2017:114). As Robinson (2023:395) notes, probing is essential for generating meaningful insights, as it enables the researcher to explore deeper, often unarticulated layers of memory and personal experience. Through probing, interviews move beyond superficial opinion gathering and avoid becoming mere face-to-face questionnaires.

Putting what the speaker says into your own words by paraphrasing is a component of active listening (Kabir, 2017:19). Kabir (2017:19) goes on to say that paraphrasing entails rewording speakers' spoken words rather than using the same ones. When the interviewer summarises what the interviewee just stated, in fewer words without altering its meaning, this is known as paraphrasing. It is one of the proficient ways to demonstrate comprehension through active listening. Goals (such as reinforce, explain, emphasise, and double-check) must be determined when paraphrasing (Kabir, 2017:108). In paraphrasing in this research, the researcher used diverse words to reaffirm in a permissive way what the participant is sharing.

Recording an interview (whether in writing or digitally) must be done in a thorough manner, but the researcher must get permission from the participant before recording the interview (Karlsen, Sørensen, Larsen, Heyn & Gerwing, 2025). It is often helpful to take notes during the interview so that the researcher can review the answers and additional questions at the end of the interviews. The researcher also needs to make a written record (transcript) of the interview for data analysis. The interviews must be transcribed as soon as possible to avoid misrepresentation of data (Maree, 2016:95).

Qualitative interviewing skills were implemented during this study through data collection. Throughout the study, active listening, close observation of both verbal and non-verbal communication, probing, and paraphrasing helped facilitate interviews by clarifying and unpacking meaning. Asking open-ended questions, reflexivity, and ethical awareness helped shape all interviews. Complete recording and thorough notetaking, as well as prompt transcription, allowed for accurate data collection. Overall implementation of quality interviewing skills allowed this researcher to obtain detailed and trustworthy descriptions of participants' experiences.

3.5 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the procedure used to transform raw data into useful information. The data collected must be well organised before it can be interpreted or analysed (Taherdoost, 2021). Data analysis in qualitative studies involves processes, methods, and techniques that help produce meaning, insight, and interpretation of the people,

experiences, events, and phenomenon being studied (Hameed, 2024:23). Qualitative data analysis is thus concerned with providing an interpretation of words and text, not transforming data into numbers. Text usually comes from participants' descriptions and observations.

Data analysis involves the intellectual process of breaking information into small segments to give details about how the parts relate to each other (Lune & Berg, 2017). As such, patterns, trends, connections and meanings of the data are sought and data are grouped based on these features into themes and categories (Mouton, as cited in Zireva, 2013; Muzari et al., 2022:19). The goal of data analysis is always to identify possible connections between ideas and see if similar patterns can be abstracted to represent themes found in the data. Mohajan (2018) states that the qualitative data analysis process majorly involves seeking out patterns that recur in data. Qualitative data takes the form of words and text. This is because qualitative data are interview transcripts said verbatim, and field notes with detailed descriptions of what was observed. Since qualitative data are textual, it cannot be easily quantified or used for statistical analysis.

Analysis of qualitative data is not only descriptive, but also explanatory of the experiences of participants. This is because the information gives meaning to the processes taking place in the participants' accounts of their experiences (Singleton & Straits, 2017:294). Qualitative data can come from interview transcripts, diaries, reports, journals and any other textual written format. Analysis of this information occurs best when done along data collection (Natow, 2019; Shareia, as cited in Turner, Ting, Wong, Lim & Tan, 2021:5).

Qualitative analysis should be systematic, organised, and done in steps. Analysing qualitative data can be slow because large amounts of information are collected. However, it is also labour-intensive because decisions need to be made on how to go about analysing the data, which should be guided by the purpose of the study, underpinning theory, and nature of qualitative research being inductive in nature (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Bingham, 2023:1).

Qualitative content analysis is one way of analysing qualitative data. Qualitative content analysis is “A research method for making systematic, subjective and replicable inference from text to uncover meanings (themes) through the processes of coding and identifying patterns” (Shava, Hleza, Tlou, Shoniwa & Mathonsi et al., 2021). Qualitative content analysis is inductive, allowing categories and themes to emerge through analysis and constant comparison by the researcher.

Tesch’s method of thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data (Merriam, 1998). The researcher read and reread the transcripts, obtaining a general sense of the information conveyed and then began coding for emerging themes and subthemes. An independent coder was used to increase the trustworthiness of the study. The independent coder analysed the data and the themes and subthemes from the researcher's analysis and the independent coder's analysis were compared and discussed until consensus was reached. The final themes were discussed with the research supervisor to ensure they aligned with the study's objectives and methodological framework.

In this study the researcher analysed the data as follows, guided by the eight steps of Tesch (cited in Creswell, 2014:198):

- The researcher read all the transcriptions cautiously and jotted down impressions that draw attention while reading.
- The researcher chose one manuscript (that is one interview), the most remarkable one, the simplest, and the one on top of the pile. When reading it, the researcher pondered upon what is meant and jotted down ideas in the margin.
- When this was accomplished for several participants, a list of all the themes was compiled. Comparable themes were organised, and topics were arranged into columns as major, distinct and excess topics.
- The topics were then abbreviated, and the abbreviations/codes were written next to the suitable sections of the text. The classifications and codes that materialised were included.
- The most eloquent expression for the topics was found and turned into categories. Related topics were grouped together to reduce the total list of

categories. Lines were drawn between categories to show interrelations, when originated.

- A final verdict was taken on the abbreviation for each classification and codes were placed in alphabetical order.
- The information material according to each classification was gathered in one place and a main analysis was undertaken.
- The existing information was recorded if required and the writing of the report instigated.

After the researcher analysed the collected data, verification of the data followed. The data were then confirmed by verifying its credibility, transferability, confirmability, dependability, trustworthiness, and flexibility.

3.6 ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

It is essential to assess the quality of the information that has been collected and analyse it. This is referred to as the trustworthiness of the research. Ensuring trustworthiness is crucial in establishing the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings (Ahmed, 2024:1). Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be determined by assessing the extent to which the findings represent the studied phenomenon. Qualitative inquiry is known to help address questions about people's social realities and experiences through detailed but non-statistical information that cannot be counted (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Tenny et al., 2022).

Qualitative research has different standards compared to quantitative research because while quantitative studies focus on objectivity, generalisability, and relationships between variables, qualitative research focuses on accuracy, making sure the information studied is authentic (Abidin, Patah, Majid, Usman & Zulkornain, 2024:9). Qualitative research can thus be subjective since qualitative researchers interpret the collected information. One way to determine its trustworthiness is through four main criteria defined by Lincoln and Guba in 1985, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). These aspects are discussed below.

3.6.1 Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility assesses how accurately findings represent participants' experiences and meanings (Ahmed, 2024:2). Equivalently to internal validity in quantitative research, credibility answers the question of whether a study tells a believable and truthful story about the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015; Rashid, 2025). Qualitative researchers can strengthen credibility by purposefully applying specific methodological procedures such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation with participants, triangulation, member checking and several other tactics. Some credibility-building tactics are more relevant to certain types of studies than others; therefore, researchers need to carefully justify why and how selected strategies will be applied (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Appropriate application of theoretical or conceptual frameworks as well as frequent connections to relevant literature also strengthen credibility and enhance transferability. Demonstrating that the findings connect to already established knowledge proves that participant interpretations are grounded in analytical reasoning rather than personal biases (Bingham, 2023:2). Credibility can furthermore be increased through research debriefing by consulting colleagues or the academic supervisor on potential weaknesses in findings. Peer debriefing requires providing others with concise summaries of emerging findings and using their feedback to reconsider initial thoughts and shore up arguments (Punch, 2013:113).

For this study exploring community members' perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration, the following tactics were used to provide credibility to findings:

- Prolonged engagement referred to how long the researcher spent communicating with participants.
- During face-to-face semi-structured interviews, the researcher developed an understanding of participants' perceptions and the contexts that influence them.
- Persistent observation meant noting similarities and differences as well as emotionally laden language across multiple interviews.

- Triangulation was achieved by cross-checking participants' experiences with scholarly literature on sex offending and reintegration.
- Peer debriefing was conducted with the author's supervisor who provided feedback on preliminary findings.

Opportunities to ask for clarification were also given to participants throughout interviews when needed. This technique ensures member validation of data. Taken together, the selected credibility strategies allowed for accurately portraying community members lived experiences.

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which study findings are potentially meaningful in other contexts than the research setting (Stahl & King, 2020). Transferability in qualitative studies is similar to external validity in quantitative studies. However, qualitative researchers are not concerned with statistical generalisation. Through rich, thick, and contextualised description of participants' experiences and the researcher's interpretations, qualitative researchers allow readers to determine whether findings can be transferred to other populations or settings (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen et al., 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transferability has also been defined as "the degree to which findings may be applied in other contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative researchers promote transferability by providing broad description of research context and setting, characteristics of the sample, and research procedures (Abidin et al., 2024:9).

For the current study, transferability was addressed as follows:

- Selecting research participants who were able to provide informed views about the phenomenon of interest.
- Purposeful sampling was used to ensure breadth and richness of information obtained from community members who held differing views about sex offender reintegration at the community level.
- Thorough description of the research setting, participant characteristics, recruitment strategy, and data collection procedures allows readers to determine

whether the results of this study may be transferred to other communities or contexts.

- Through thorough descriptions of participants' answers and community where the study took place, the researcher allows readers to determine if and how study findings may fit their own context interested in sex offender reintegration.

3.6.3 Dependability

Dependability focuses on consistency within the study and its findings over time. It assesses whether the processes undertaken in the research were logical, well documented, and clearly connected to the research questions, allowing someone else to duplicate the findings were they to replicate the study (Rashid, 2025). Dependability strategies focus on ensuring research questions follow from the methods used and decisions made throughout the research process were applied consistently (Hayre & Muller, 2019:9). Dependability relates to the expectation that qualitative work will vary because it can be affected by contextual or experiential elements of reality and will not be replicated (Cheong, Kim & Park, 2023). This can be especially true when saturation has been reached and data no longer reveal new information but begin to stabilise with consistent patterns (Janis, 2022:241).

The main way to establish dependability is through creation of an audit trail. Audit trails allow for documentation of all steps taken during each phase of research including study design, sample sizes, decisions made during data collection and steps taken during analysis (Hayre & Muller, 2019:10). Details, specifics, and transparency allow others to trace the logic of your research steps, limiting ambiguity of methods used to generate findings and increasing methodological rigour (Abidin et al., 2024:10).

Dependability was ensured as follows in the current study:

- Exploring community member's views on reintegrating sex offenders back into society, the researcher created a clear description of methods.
- Research questions, sampling, data collection, and analysis were all explained in detail to account for consistency throughout the study.

- An independent coder was used to code data separately. The researcher and the coder then compared their codes and discussed why they chose to code segments of data the way they did and why themes were developed.
- This strategy allowed for the researcher to account for consistency within coding and analysis of data, therefore, minimising bias of the researcher.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which qualitative results are based on the participants' given information and not on the interests, motivations, concerns or preferences of the researcher. Confirmability ensures that researcher's bias does not affect the interpretation of data collected. Rather, findings can be 'traced back to the respondents' answers' (Abidin et al., 2024:10; Bingham, 2023; Rashid, 2025). Hence, researchers should attempt to bracket their assumptions/ preferences while giving opportunities for the respondents' interpretations to develop the findings.

Steps to ensure confirmability include reflexivity or acknowledging thoughts/ feelings/ biases throughout the research process. Acknowledging these thoughts allows researchers to "eliminate potential bias throughout research" by being aware of personal leanings that may affect the analysis of data (Schmidt & Brown, 2015:235). Reflexivity allows readers of a research report to understand how researchers arrived at their interpretations. It can be established by triangulating information with existing literature or verifying it against relevant theory (Bingham, 2023).

The current research addressed confirmability as follows:

- Engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process and through member-checking data when possible.
- An open mind was kept throughout the data collection and analysis process so that participants felt comfortable sharing their answers and so that their responses were not misinterpreted.
- Steps were taken to not force data to fit the researchers' agenda or specific topics.

- Member-checking occurred, when possible, to ensure participants truly meant what they said.
- By grounding the themes and topics in data and including verbatims throughout, confirmability was strengthened.

To ensure confirmability, qualitative researchers often use reflexivity as a way of remaining self-aware and critically reflecting on how their values, assumptions, experiences, and positionalities affect their research. Reflexivity allows the researcher to disclose and account for researcher influence rather than pretend that it does not exist (which is impossible in qualitative research) (McLeod & Porter, 2024:11). Reflexivity aims to make qualitative research more trustworthy by making the researcher's influence explicit. Reflexivity can be defined as a "process by which qualitative researchers actively reflect on how … subjectivity and context affect data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (Olmos-Vega, Stalmeijer, Varpio & Kahlke, 2022:24).

One technique qualitative researcher employs to practise reflexivity is through reflexive journaling. Keeping a reflexive journal involves recording your thoughts, emotions, new ideas, and research decisions as you work (Minion, 2023). Reflexivity benefits qualitative research by building openness and showing readers how credibility was ensured throughout your study (Abidin et al., 2024:10). In this research study, reflexivity was used to help limit biases and attempts to allow my personal beliefs or emotional reactions to sway the findings of how communities feel about reintegrating sex offenders into society. Sexual offending is not only a crime but can feel like a moral wrongdoing. This brought many assumptions and emotions that I had to reflect on while collecting and analysing the data. Reflexivity allowed me to ethically interact with my participants and their stories while analysing data without my personal perspective interfering.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the outset of the research, and before gathering data, consideration should be given to the ethical and legal considerations and principles that should be applied since it is researchers' moral duty as scholars to do so and because research institutions will

expect applications for ethical approval to be filed. Research design and data gathering are common topics of ethical discussion. However, ethics plays a significant role in analysis as well. The literature has extensively examined and demonstrated a researcher's responsibilities in this regard (Archer 2018:19). Ethics is concerned with moral issues associated to the conduct of research. Bos (2020) defines research ethics as an examination into what is good and wrong, as well as what researchers should do. The emphasis is on the duties of researchers to the rights and interests of their participants, audience, academic community, and society (Cameron et al., 1994; Judd et al., 1991; British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2004, 2018, quoted by Mirza, Bellalem & Mirza, 2023:442). The following ethical principles were adhered to during this research:

3.7.1 Do no harm

The literature emphasises that conducting qualitative research on sensitive topics is often characterised by ethical and methodological challenges emerging from underlying tensions (Taquette, 2022). According to Farrimond (2017), participants may experience distress, discomfort, misunderstanding of the relationship, sadness, bad emotions, and other unfavourable characteristics of psychological contact.

According to Taquette, (2022) dilemmas in this regard occur in the following three contexts:

- Uncomfortable interactions can occur when research participants experience discrimination, have experienced trauma histories, or when research engages with topics that participants find highly personal or distressing. This can also happen to researchers themselves, which may lead to discomfort, compromised objectivity, or skewed interpretation.
- Power differentials coupled with the researcher's political positionalities may cause ethical concerns by influencing research processes and outcomes through interpretation and relationship dynamics that negatively impact the project. This is especially prone to occur when researchers have lived experiences or identities similar to research participants. This positioning takes ongoing reflexivity to keep at the forefront of the research process.

- Some research considers ethical issues that may occur when publishing findings such as repercussions from sharing stigmatised results, returning results to participants (member checks), or sharing data for secondary analysis.

Taken together, much of the literature concludes that ethics and qualitative methodology cannot be separated, as ethical dilemmas often occur within projects centred around violence, trauma, sexuality, and marginalised groups. Ongoing reflexivity about the researcher–participant relationship and the research process can help to minimise the risk of causing harm to participants and community (Taquette, 2022).

Breach of privacy or violation of private life can cause significant societal damage and distress (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). According to Tulyakul and Meepring (cited by Gencteng, 2021:151), consent for sharing information involves both cognitive and emotional considerations. Whenever human research is undertaken, researchers must prioritise the wellbeing of the research subjects. The research question is never the most important consideration. This means that if forced to choose between harming a participant and harming the research, the research takes precedence. Researchers should maintain a respectful attitude towards all those involved in or affected by the research they are conducting, including themself. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and without prejudice, considering both their rights and differences based on age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief, or any other significant characteristic (Mirza et al., 2023:442).

Guided by the ethical principle of non-maleficence (“first, do no harm”), the Unisa REC: SBE created a set of detailed ethical guidance measures to enable social science research by the University’s students to continue where possible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (University of South Africa, Year, 2022). As prescribed, due consideration was given to research which involved physical contact with or close physical proximity to participants, particularly when there was no foreseeable benefit to participants that outweighed risk of transmission of COVID-19. Researchers unable to postpone data collection were encouraged to utilise alternatives to physical proximity wherever

possible, such as Skype, WhatsApp or other online/web-based applications, to reduce risk of harm to participants and researchers (Hansen, 2020:1).

Securing the participants from any possible form of risk that they may experience is a key requirement. The researcher has an obligation to guarantee the participants' protection. To safeguard participants from possible risk, the researcher considered any discomfort and ensured that they remained keen to carry on with the interviews. The participants were also in control of the depth of the information they imparted and decided to what degree they were willing to share it with the researcher. The researcher abided by the COVID-19 protocols (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Republic of South Africa, 2020) by doing interviews online using the live web-conferencing tools WhatsApp platforms, GoToMeetings and Zoom meetings to avoid putting participants at risk. The researcher also arranged for a social worker to be available to debrief participants if the interviews aroused overwhelming sensations that may perhaps cause emotional distress for them (Addenda G).

3.7.2 Informed consent

Obtaining participants' Informed consent to participate in the research is a legal and ethical necessity for all research involving human participants. Informed consent is a key premise in clinical research, despite its recent origins (Arellano, Camacho & López, 2023:5). Consent in research means that human volunteers enter the study willingly, with complete information about the study provided, and that their consent is obtained prior to participation. The notion of informed consent is established to ensure that relationships between researchers and participants in research are built on trust and integrity, as well as to protect people's right to choose whether to participate in research (Berkovic, 2023).

In clinical research, informed consent involves giving participants study information and getting their voluntary willingness to participate. The goal is to protect participants' rights and welfare by providing them with information about the research's benefits and hazards, allowing them to make an educated decision about whether to participate (Arellano, et al., 2023:1). Researchers must obtain 'voluntary informed consent' in

written from all participants prior to any data collecting session. Each participant should receive an informed consent letter. The consent letter should clarify the research's principal aim and objective, as well as its ethics, such as confidentiality and anonymity concerns (Mirza et al., 2023:443).

Participation in this study was voluntary. All persons who consented to participate signed a written informed consent document (see Addendum C). Each participant signed the consent form voluntarily and the signature on the consent form did not bind participants to continue with the study if they changed their minds. Participants were informed that they could stop participating at any time during the study without penalty. Participants were not coerced, pressured, or promised any incentives to participate and were informed they would not receive any monetary or other reward for participating.

3.7.3 Confidentiality

When collecting, analysing, and reporting data, it is important to follow ethical norms to preserve participants' privacy. Confidentiality is ensured by removing or modifying any personally identifiable information supplied by participants and included in the data Boruch & Cecil, 2016; Kang & Hwang, 2023:2) Researchers must follow ethical guidelines regarding anonymity and confidentiality when conducting studies, adhering to ethical and legal requirements while using confidential information (Christen et al., cited by Kang & Hwang, 2023:2).

The researcher described confidentiality to participants, assured them that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research process, and that no information received would be traceable to individual participants. The researcher told participants that she would not use their names when talking about their story and that their privacy would be maintained. The researcher also explained that there are limitations to confidentiality and that if there was an emergency and someone was going to be harmed, including the participant, they would act, and participants would be informed of what was occurring.

3.7.4 Anonymity

Anonymity refers to data collecting without acquiring personally identifiable information. Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality is crucial for credible research as it directly impacts the quality of the data obtained (Kang & Hwang, 2023:2; Lee, 2025). When participants are assured of their anonymity, they are more likely to provide sensitive or personal information, resulting in more comprehensive and accurate results.

Dougherty (2021:480) states that when conducting qualitative fieldwork on sensitive themes, participants' particulars need to be kept discreet and anonymous. Qualitative researchers must protect the confidentiality of fieldwork interviewees when publishing their findings. Because interviewees are protected, it is difficult for third parties to verify or duplicate published findings. Therefore, the scholarly community must rely on qualitative researchers' word when publishing their findings. Researchers should make every effort to ensure the anonymity of research participants and the privacy of data (Mirza et al., 2023:444). Before beginning data collecting sessions, these two items must be and were explained to participants and included in the researcher-participant agreement. All data must be handled and stored in line with the Data Protection Act; Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA) (RSA, 2013). Access to the data should be restricted to the researcher and, if applicable, the research team members. All records, both in written and audio form, should be kept in a safe yet immediately accessible area (Mirza et al., 2023:444).

Anonymity was maintained in this research during all stages of the research process to protect the wellbeing and rights of the participants involved. They were informed that their identities would remain hidden and that their names would not be mentioned in any research notes or reports. The researcher used pseudonyms when referring to participants to avoid identifying them. Ensuring anonymity allowed the participants to feel comfortable when discussing their experiences.

3.7.5 Beneficence

One of the most important ethical issues relating to research is beneficence, which is also the primary objective of all study projects. Beneficence implies that the participants'

risk should be decreased as much as possible and the benefits to participants and society should be increased (Graziano & Raulin, 2014:83). The General Principles (A-E) of the American Psychological Association (APA) (American Psychological Association, 2017) include beneficence and nonmaleficence as Principal A. This means that any research should benefit participants and not cause them any harm or damage to them.

To guarantee the participants' safety and wellbeing, appropriate precautions must be taken in this regard. Protecting the participants' rights and welfare is an aspect of beneficence and nonmaleficence. To ensure the welfare and safety of the participants, researchers must be conscious of personal (including their own physical and mental health), financial, social, organisational, and political factors (Shetgovekar, 2018:120).

The participants in the study benefited from the research and were not put in danger. They felt valued and respected, and they had a right to receive truthful information about their participation in the study. They had the option to share their opinions and make recommendations through the study, aiming for both individual and communal benefits. The researcher made sure they had enough time to express their ideas and affect future change.

3.7.6 Management of information

Data management incorporates various tasks that cooperatively facilitate operative data utilisation by the researcher (van Gils, 2020:12). Researchers must be mindful of appropriate administration and ensure that the gathered information is securely stored in line with data security ethics. The onus is on the researcher to ensure that data are not passed on to third parties who have no connection with the research. The information must only be used for the purpose for which it was initially compiled (Denscombe, 2012:131). Creswell (2014:99) affirms that in qualitative research, pennames or aliases for persons and residences to safeguard the participants are used. The researcher obviously needs approval to obtain such information, but the delicate nature of the information places a considerable burden on the researcher.

The information was managed well and in safe hands, as promised to the participants. The researcher had an obligation to ensure that the records were managed well, and that no one would have access to them. The researcher kept the information safe, and password protected. Audio recordings generated through Microsoft Teams were securely stored and protected from unauthorised access, ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of the recorded data. The data will be securely stored for 15 years as prescribed by UNISA REC (2022).

3.7.7 Debriefing of participants

It was considered that appropriate debriefing of participants would serve as an important ethical concern of this study. Experience has shown that in studies that involve potentially traumatic or personal topics, debriefing is "part of the informed consent process and extends over the duration of research participation" (Bos, 2020:258). It typically consists of clearly outlining the purpose of the study and why participants were chosen, reminding them of the intended use of their participation, answering any questions they might have regarding the process itself and clarifying any misunderstandings they might have regarding aspects of the study (Allen, 2017:355). In this study, debriefing was offered to participants as they were asked to divulge information about their personal views and experiences regarding topics that might have affected them strongly.

Should participants exhibit signs of distress during their interviews, the researcher was careful to address any negative emotions experienced. If participants exhibited notable discomfort when sharing their stories, the researcher would refrain from further inquiry and break off/pause the interview session if necessary and relevant, with a follow up interview to be completed later. If needed, debriefing would have been administered by a qualified professional therapist in a manner suitable to the participant's emotional state (see Addendum G). No participant, however, requested any debriefing.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In essence, Chapter 3 describes and justifies how the study was conceptualised and approached methodologically. The chapter provides a detailed account of how this was

translated into practical research steps. It clarified why a qualitative methodology with exploratory, descriptive, contextual designs was suitable for exploring community perceptions about sex offender reintegration in Mamelodi. The chapter explains how the sample of participants were purposely selected with the aid of inclusion and exclusion criteria. It describes how access was gained through gatekeepers. Finally, it explained how interviews were prepared for, piloted, and conducted (acknowledging adaptations made for COVID-19), and how interview data were transcribed, organised, and analysed through the steps of Tesch with independent checking (coding) for trustworthiness. Lastly, it is discussed and explained how trustworthiness and ethical integrity were actively protected throughout the research process, to ensure that the study's findings are based on participants' accounts and produced through ethically responsible qualitative practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The study explores community perspectives on sex offenders reintegrated into the Mamelodi township community. The results of this study provide suggestions for social work practice for a more effective service delivery to members of the community. The application of the knowledge gained will assist social workers to support individuals who experience victimisation, lack of support and the recognition of the community voice for successful reintegration of sex offenders into the community.

As explained, the researcher followed a qualitative research approach. An interview guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews to gather information from community members. The data gathered were analysed using Tesch's approach (in Creswell, 2014:198), grouped into themes, subthemes, and categories.

In this chapter the attention firstly falls on the presentation of the biographical particulars of the participants. This is followed by a thematic presentation of the research findings, noting the views, opinions, and experiences of participants regarding the reintegration of sex offenders into their community. The themes emerged during the data analysis conducted by an independent coder and the researcher in consultation with the study leader. The themes are subjected to a literature control which contextualises the findings against existing knowledge.

4.2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The biographical details of the participants are significant as they provide the contextual lens through which community perspectives on the reintegration of sex offenders can be understood. Table 4.1 outlines the biographical details of the participants in this study:

Table 4-1Biographical information of participants

PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYM	AGE	RACE	HOME LANGUAGE	HIGHEST QUALIFICATION/ OCCUPATION	PERIOD RESIDING IN TOWNSHIP	GENDER
AM	38	Black	IsiXhosa	Teacher	12 years	F
BL	25	Black	Tswana	Student	25 years	F
DB	39	Black	Sotho	IT specialist	8 years	F
D	28	Black	Pedi	Nurse	15 years	F
AR	59	Black	Sotho	Researcher	6 years	M
FM	39	Black	IsiZulu	Labour relations	10 years	M
FS	36	Coloured	Afrikaans	Teacher	17 years	M
GZ	19	Coloured	Afrikaans	Student	19 years	M
KA	28	Black	Tswana	Student	9 years	M
MN	60	Black	IsiZulu	Police officer	41 Years	F
NG	59	Black	IsiXhosa	Social worker	14 years	F
NN	60	Black	IsiXhosa	Accountant	10 years	F
RA	30	Black	Pedi	Matric	15 years	F
SN	41	Black	IsiXhosa	Matric	11 Years	M
Sihle	32	Black	IsiZulu	Administration clerk	7 years	M

The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 60 years showing a good diversity. This diversity in ages, allowed that both younger and older generational views are captured. This reflects how attitudes may be shaped by the experiences of participants and their shifting social values. Participants are male and female, including both sexes to ensure that discoveries are relevant to the whole population, not just a subset of it. Participants occupied varied occupations, such as that of teachers, nurses, police officers, and social workers, whilst a number of students was also included. This distribution added perspectives informed by personal experiences and also by professional roles related to safety, care, and community development. The different languages spoken highlights a cultural diversity, which spanned from IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Sotho, Pedi, Tswana, and Afrikaans. This accentuates the cultural frameworks that influence beliefs around aspects like justice, punishment, and rehabilitation. Participants' varying years of

residence in Mamelodi, from six to over 40 years, further shows that both long-standing community members and newer residents contributed to the study, which adds depth and variation in the community insight.

South Africa is a culturally varied society because, its organisations are composed of people from various cultural origins, and these people have a variety of perspectives, thoughts, beliefs, norms, customs, and values (Van Zyl, Rothmann & Ruch, 2015). Cultural diversity, according to Amadeo (2013), is the representation of race, ethnicity, language, nationality, and religion in a single organisation or community. According to Da Veiga and Martins (2017), culture is always perceived as a collective phenomenon, although it can be linked to several collectives with a range of individuals, as stated by Harunavamwe and Palmer (2022:19).

According to published research, migration enhances cultural diversity in metropolitan settings (Kihato, Massoumi, & Ruble, 2010; Huijsmans, Harteveld, Van der Brug, & Lancee, 2021). According to Huijsmans et al. (2021), the increase in variety leads people to learn to accommodate one another in terms of language, citizenship, ethnicity and race, class and income, and gender. Urban areas consistently have high percentages of multiracial households, which is not surprising (Maluleke, 2022:22). There will inevitably be cultural differences in every racially divided society, including the language used to designate the legacy of each race or demographic group. Black Africans, whites, coloureds, and Indian/Asian people make up the majority of the four racial groups that make up South Africa. In households and in society, gender affects how people perceive and behave. Moreover, the roles that both men and women perform reflect the socially enforced behavioural standards that impact their daily experiences and conduct (Maluleke 2022:23; Pelletti, Cattaneo & Rossi, 2022).

In social interactions throughout the African continent, age differences are significant. Age dynamics have long been considered significant by scholars when studying African communities. When two interlocutors are conversing and one asks a question, there are theoretically sound grounds to assume that the participants may alter their answers to politically and economically significant questions based on whether or not there is an age-group difference in the African context (Erlich & McCormack, 2020:1).

Men and women have been wedged in a number of areas by these socially manufactured distinctions. On an interactional level, for example, men and women interact differently depending on the cooperative and influential roles they play in society. Women's language promotes cooperation and support, whereas men's language incorporates characteristics of dominance and power exhibition (Coates, 2015; Mohajer & Mohd Jan, 2019:787).

Together, these brief biographical details were provided to convey the diversity of the sample and to explain how differing social locations, cultural backgrounds, and histories added to the depth of the study and to the trustworthiness of the findings.

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 3, the researcher used pseudonyms or pen names to preserve participant identification and uphold the ethical concept of anonymity. The researcher pledged to uphold the ethical principles specified in Chapter 3, including confidentiality, informed consent, beneficence, anonymity, privacy, debriefing, and information management, since using real names may make it simpler for participants to be connected to information shared. This is in line with the directive of Saldana and Omasta (2018:418) that fictitious names are used in research in place of actual names to guarantee participant protection and anonymity. Similar sentiments are expressed by Anderson and Corneli (2018:41), who propose that once research findings are released to the public, readers should never be able to identify or connect participants to the information; rather, their identities should always be protected. Lahman (2018:83) and Gaudet and Robert (2018:132) likewise support the use of pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, confidentiality, and to make it impossible to identify participants.

This concludes the presentation of biographical information, and a discussion of the themes, subthemes, and categories that emerged from the data analysis process follows.

4.3 THEMES, SUBTHEMES AND CATEGORIES

The data obtained from the semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted with the participants were thematically analysed by myself and an independent coder, and the emerging themes were further discussed and refined in collaboration with my supervisor to ensure rigour, and alignment with the research objectives. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the themes, subthemes, and categories that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 4-2 Themes, subthemes and categories

THEMES	SUBTHEMES	CATEGORIES
Theme 1: Exposure and understanding of sexual offences and reintegration after serving sentencing	Subtheme 1: Participant understanding of sexual offences	•Sexual activity without consent •Forcing yourself on someone else •Rape, harassment, molestation. •Attacking women and children sexually
	Subtheme 2: The effect of sexual offences on the community	•Victim wellbeing •Families get traumatised. •Communities living with fear and anger
Theme 2: Community reaction to reintegration	Subtheme 1: Positive reactions by community	•Positive - encourages reintegration. •Conflicted between concerns and accepting perpetrator back
	Subtheme 2: Negative reactions by community	•Fear, distrust and perceived risk. •Community discomfort, social distance, and stigmatisation • Emotional resistance and moral opposition to reintegration •Punitive, retaliatory, and justice-driven attitudes

Theme 3: Managing the reintegration process	Subtheme 1: Recognition of and respect for the victim's position	
	Subtheme 2: Community support	
	Subtheme 3: Education and awareness programmes	
	Subtheme 4: Accountability of perpetrator	
	Subtheme 5: Not allowing the perpetrator back into the community	
Theme 4: Role of social workers in the reintegration process	Subtheme 1: The victim	
	Subtheme 2: The family	
	Subtheme 3: The community	•Equip community members to address social issues. •Evaluate impact on community and keep them informed. •Community dialogue •Awareness and education
	Subtheme 4: The perpetrator	•Monitoring and accountability •Psychosocial and rehabilitative support
	Subtheme 5: Systematic and reintegrative roles of social workers in the reintegration process	•Research and data-informed practice. •Advocate for policies and protect human rights. •Co-ordinated counselling and restorative facilitation •The facilitation of restorative encounters between victims and perpetrators

The following segment of this report narrates each theme in detail, together with its subthemes and categories. Where necessary, quotes and storylines from the

participants' narratives are utilised to authenticate and endorse the findings. The body of knowledge is used to emphasise similarities and differences in the research findings, and quotations are used to argue the disparities. This means that additionally to the quoted storylines of the participants' narratives, literature in the form of a literature control is used to either introduce a theme, subtheme or category, or to confirm and/or contrast a theme and/or storyline.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Exposure and understanding of sexual offences and reintegration after serving sentencing

This theme explains sexual offences, participants' disclosure and comprehension, and sex offender reintegration following their release from prison (see Table 4-3). Two subthemes that complemented the main theme emerged during the participant's conversation, along with categories. The subthemes are participant understanding of sexual offences, and the effect of sexual offences on the community.

Table 4-3 Theme 1 and subthemes

THEMES	SUBTHEMES	CATEGORIES
Theme 1: Exposure and understanding of sexual offences and reintegration after serving sentencing	Subtheme 1: Participant understanding of sexual offences.	•Sexual activity without consent •Forcing yourself on someone else •Rape, harassment, molestation. •Attacking women and children sexually
	Subtheme 2: The effect of sexual offences on the community	•Victim wellbeing •Families get traumatised. •Communities living with fear and anger

Over the past 20 years, public awareness of sex offenders and more stringent laws against them have made it harder for sex offenders who have completed their sentences to get back on their feet in many western nations. Scholars have become more interested in public views towards sex offenders due to their influence on sex offender

laws and the fact that exclusionary and unfriendly community responses actually raise the risk of sexual offences (Höing, Petrina, Duke, Völlm & Vogelvang, 2016:2). Sexual offenders can be anyone from small toddlers to the elderly, and they have historically caused fright and moral disgust in society (Bersot & Arrigo, 2015:32–33; Jordaan & Hesselink, 2018: 206; Mairs, 2013:1).

A sexual act that is performed or attempted by someone else without the victim's free consent or against someone who is incapable of giving consent or refusing, is considered sexual violence (Basile et al., 2014; Soldino, López-Pinar & Carbonell-Vay´a, 2024:1). The term 'sex offender' is widely used, but there seems to be no agreed-upon definition, and communities often differ of who a sex offender is and what acts constitute sexual offending. Harris and Socia (2016:1) argue that public definitions of sex offenders are frequently shaped by media portrayals, which tend to emphasise extreme cases, a stereotypical image of sexual deviance. In contrast, Levenson, Brannon, Fortney and Baker (2007:7) point out that community members often conflate a wide range of behaviours, from consensual but underage relationships to violent sexual assault, under the same label of sex offender. This often indirectly displays moral and cultural judgment. Given these differences in definitions and meanings of who a sex offender is and what sexual offending entails, it is important to first explore how participants themselves understood sexual offences (Subtheme 1), before considering their views on the broader impact such offences have on the community (Subtheme 2).

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Participant understanding of sexual offences

Sexual offences can be characterised in various manners due to their diverse manifestations. However, sex offending is not a generic category of behaviour; rather, it includes a wide range of harms, from non-contact offences like voyeurism, indecent exposure, and grooming to more serious ones like rape, sexual murder, and child sexual abuse and exploitation. Not all sexual offenders are equally dangerous. According to McAlinden (2016) sexual violence denotes any sexual act inflicted upon an individual who has not consented or is incapable of consenting to the act. A multitude of detrimental effects of sexual violence have been recorded in research (Richards et al., 2020:7). Any sexual act carried out against a person by coercion, threats of coercion,

or force is considered sexual violence. Rape, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, sexual slavery, and any other sexually suggestive conduct of similar seriousness are all included (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICR), 2024:1). The participants in this research indicated their understanding of a sexual offence as listed in the categories that follow.

- **Category 1: Sexual activity without consent**

Some participants indicated that a sexual offence is a sexual activity without consent, and their viewpoints are as follows:

"I think a sexual violence offender is someone who engages in sexual activities without consent, such as rape". ***(AM 20–21).***

"A sexual violence offender, to me, is someone who commits a sexual act against another person without their consent". ***(DB 23–24).***

"A sexual violence offender is someone who sexually violates other people. A person who has sex without consent". ***(D 20–21).***

"A sexual violence offender refers to an individual who forcibly engages in sexual activity or a sexual relationship with another person without that person's consent". ***(AR 22–23).***

"A sexual violence offender is someone who initiates a sexual act against another person without their free will, whether through fondling, penetration, touching, or molestation". ***(NN 22–24).***

"I think it is someone who has sexual intercourse without consent". ***(SN 22).***

Most participants defined a sex offender as an individual who commits a sexual activity without consent, and this view aligns well with legal and scholarly definitions. According to Lordan (2020), sexual consent is the required and reciprocal agreement between two

people to have sexual activity that is appropriate for their age. That underscores the centrality of consent in determining sexual offences, while similarly describing that coercion includes a wide range of actions and behaviours, including physical force, psychological intimidation, threats, and emotional blackmail, as well as the victim's incapacity to give consent due to age, drug use, intoxication, sleep, or mental incapacity (Keena & Zinsstag, 2022:29; Jewkes et al., 2002: 149; Wertheimer, 2003).

These storylines suggest that most participants demonstrated a correct understanding of what sexual offending is.

- **Category 2: Forcing yourself on someone else**

Some participants accentuated that a sex offender is someone who forces himself or herself sexually on another person. As one participant noted, *"It is someone who forces himself or herself onto another person, an act for which they may be arrested or sentenced".* ***(FM 31–34).***

Another similarly explained, *"I think that's a person who sexually forces himself on somebody else, obviously without their consent*". (**FS 10–11).**

This emphasis on the use of force aligns with existing literature, as it identifies coercion as a key element in definitions of sexual violence. Sexual offences are described by the World Health Organisation (2002) as any sexual act that is attempted or completed, typically involving coercion, and may involve physical contact and the use of violence. Barros, Almeida, Araújo, Moreira, Santos and Oliveira (2022:2), stress that sexual violence involves not only the absence of consent but also the use of physical force, threats, or intimidation to obtain sexual acts. In the literature, the phrases 'sexual violence,' 'sexual offending,' 'sexual assault,' 'rape,' and 'sexual abuse' are frequently used interchangeably and frequently have overlapping meanings. The WHO (2002) defines sexual violence as "Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion [physical force, psychological intimidation, or threats of physical harm], by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any

setting, including but not limited to home and work". Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, and Lozano, (2002,149) and Chan (2018:2) likewise argue that sexual offences are frequently characterised by unequal power relations where force or coercion is used to dominate the victim. In the South African context, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007) clearly recognises that compelling another person to engage in sexual activity through force, threats, or intimidation constitutes a sexual offence.

The participants' descriptions reflect a correct understanding, which highlights legal and academic perspectives that indicate force and coercion as central to sexual offending.

- **Category 3: Rape, harassment, molestation**

Some participants defined a sex offender specifically in terms of acts such as rape, harassment, or molestation as follows:

"It involves committing sexual offences such as rape or sexual harassment". ***(GZ 28–29).***

"This also includes the molestation of children; that is my understanding". ***(GZ 35).***

"In my opinion I believe a sexual offender is a person who has committed any type of rape. Yes, I would like to believe that a sexual offender is someone who has committed some types of rape, considering that there are different types. So, I'm guessing that person would have committed one or many types of those rapes". ***(KA 22-25)****.*

*"You know, but somebody that is associated with rapes". (****MN 24)****.*

These storylines show that participants used criminal labels such as rape, harassment, and molestation when explaining their understanding of a sexual offence.
Among the cited data on sexual offences, completed rape is the most prevalent, particularly within the South African context (Mgoqi-Mbalo, Zhang & Ntuli 2017; De Klerk, Spies, Van Den Berg & De Klerk, 2024:1263). Any form of sexual behaviour or

contact that takes place without the recipient's expressed consent is considered sexual assault. Forcible sexual contact, child molestation, incest, fondling, forced sexual relations, and attempted rape are all considered forms of sexual assault (Schmidt, 2025:1925).

Rape remains the most commonly recognised and reported form of sexual violence, and it dominates community perceptions of sexual offending. Sexual exploitation is a crime that includes molestation, kidnapping, and adult and child pornography (Buckner & Temme, 2024). This indicates that child molestation is frequently used in public communications as a defining characteristic of sex offenders, shaping strong emotional responses. South African law, under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007), categorises rape, sexual assault, and sexual grooming or harassment as distinct sexual offences. This underscores and reflects the understanding of the participants.

Participants' storylines in this category demonstrate a criminality theme, where sex offenders are seen to do particular criminal acts.

- **Category 4: Attacking women and children sexually**

Another way participants understood sexual offending was through the offender's choice of vulnerable groups, like women and children. For example, participants described it as follows:

*"Associated with attacking women and children sexually". (**MN 25)**.*

*"And it can happen against any person, maybe a minor, a child, or an adult". (**NN 26)**.*

*"From my understanding, it involves someone who commits sexual acts against either a minor or an adult". **(RA 33–34).***

These storylines and the perceptions of participants that sex offenders, mostly attack woman and children is confirmed in a study by Rothwell, Fido and Heym (2021), which suggests that it is a misconception that women and children are predominantly to be

viewed as victims of sexual offenses. They highlight that societal perceptions often align with the stereotype of male offenders and female victims, contributing to the belief that sexual offenses are primarily perpetrated against women and children. This also aligns with the findings that individuals perceive greater negativity and risk associated with sexual offenses involving child victims. Rothwell et al. (2021), continue to mention that although male offenders are primarily responsible for sexual offenses, female offenders represent a significant, yet often underreported, portion of perpetrators. This indicates an underlying bias in the public's perception of victims and offenders in sexual crime contexts.

These perceptions are however, fuelled by current situations within South Africa. Research by Naidoo and Van Hout (2022:119) indicates that violence against women and children, and particularly child sexual abuse (CSA), remains a public health, human rights, and humanitarian issue, specifically in South Africa. Despite progressive legislation, the rate of violence against children in South Africa remains among the highest in the world, with both boys and girls facing high risks of sexual abuse (Richter et al., 2018; Ward et al., 2018). The existence of gender inequality, low socio-cultural norms, poverty, and structural violence contributes to common victimisation, with women and children actually being the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022).

The narratives shared by participants show their understanding of sexual offences. It mostly aligns with legal and scholarly definitions, which emphasise the absence of consent, the use of force, specific criminal acts such as rape and molestation, and the targeting of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children.

Some perspectives reflect general stereotypes, such as viewing women and children as the primary victims, but these are often supported by the broader South African context, where violence against women and children remains high (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022). The participants' storylines, therefore, emphasise both accurate legal understandings and socially constructed perceptions of sexual offending. These perspectives provide important insight into how communities see and understand sexual offences. This is an

important foundation from which to understand and interpret community members' attitudes towards the reintegration of offenders.

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: The effect of sexual offences on the community

Sexual offences have severe consequences that go beyond the immediate victim to affect families and also communities (Zatkin, Sitney & Kaufman, 2021:1). Research indicates that victims often suffer long-term psychological and physical harm, including trauma, depression, and vulnerability that further enhance health risks (WHO, 2010; Ward et al., 2018). Families may also experience secondary trauma and social stigma, on top of community reactions to fear, anxiety, anger, and mistrust (Richards, et al., 2020). In South Africa, inequality, poverty, and well-established cultural norms add to this and enhance violence against women and children contributing to a social crisis (Naidoo & Van Hout, 2022; Mamabolo & Maluleke, 2022). How communities experience and see these offences influences the responds to offenders after release, shaping their reactions to support reintegration (Höing et al., 2016). Within this subtheme, participants described the effects of sexual offences through three main categories, namely victim wellbeing, families being traumatised, and communities living with fear and anger.

- **Category 1: Victim-wellbeing**

Victim wellbeing emerged as a central category within the broader subtheme concerning the effects of sexual offences on the community. Generally speaking, the word "victim" refers to someone who has been wronged, especially in legal terms (Keena & Zinsstag, 2022:32). The last layer following sexual assault is that victims may have feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and apprehension about recurrence, according to Katz (2019). They may not trust anyone because they have been betrayed after having trusted their perpetrator, friends, family, and institutions. They might experience depression, have trouble sleeping, and not have the energy to do things. Participant narratives unfolded as follows:

"These offences can cause significant harm and trauma to the victim, and it's actually essential to acknowledge the severity of these crimes". ***(BL 17-18)****.*

*"I feel for the victim, it would have psychological, emotional, and physical effects because this victim sometimes feels helpless and powerless, and it can also even affect their self-esteem to the extent that some of them develop a very low self-esteem". **(DB 31-34)**.*

*"It affects the victim mentally, physically and emotionally. The victim, as we know, becomes isolated. They don't recover quickly. Yeah, it's very hard for them to be part of the community again. And it also creates a sort of stigma around them. So yeah, it creates a very huge negative effect on them". **(D 40-44)**.*

*"I think it has enormous impacts and effects on the victim, the victim, first and foremost, will be psychologically traumatised. So, in terms of the victim, it has enormous negative impacts psychologically. Socially, they tend to be timid, reserved, and always shy away from people, especially those of the opposite sex. They become uncomfortable with the opposite gender, and that affects the family because the victim suffers psychologically. They also tend to be traumatised and worried as they have to spend money on getting medical attention and a psychological assessment". (**AR 38-51)**.*

*"I think this is the greatest offence, especially to the victim and the family, they will develop hatred towards that person". **(GZ 27-28)**.*

*"Victims may become sceptical in how they communicate with others. Families become overly cautious about whom their children or loved ones interact with". **(KA 47–50).***

*"For women especially, this experience leaves long-lasting scars of embarrassment and humiliation. Even apologies from offenders cannot undo the damage". **(MN 78–86).***

*"She might even hate men. She might not be engaging in a relationship, you know, and maybe even telling themselves that they will not even get married. You know, nowadays because they feel as if they are dirty. So, it really has an impact on victims". (**MN 100-105)**.*

"Sexual offending has a devastating impact on victims because it destroys their self-image". ***(NG 47–59)***

"Victims may experience shame and fear of being in society or participating in community life". ***(RA 57–59).***

"I cannot fully imagine the impact, but I know that such experiences deeply traumatise victims". ***(SN 46–47)***

Participants emphasised that sexual offences have devastating consequences for victims, often leaving lasting scars on their psychological, emotional, and physical wellbeing **(BL 17–18)**. Others highlighted feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, and isolation, noting that victims often struggle to reintegrate into community life and face stigma from others **(DB 31–34; D 40–44).** Another participant elaborated that those victims "*tend to be so timid and reserved and always are away from people…because the victim suffers psychologically*" **(AR 38–51)**. For some, the consequences were described as permanent, with one participant stating, "*It is a scar that will live with them for a long time… the damage has been done"* **(MN 78–86)**. This was confirmed by another who emphasised that victims may reject future intimate relationships, viewing themselves as "dirty" or unworthy **(MN 100–105).**

These accounts link with existing literature that shows the impact of sexual offences on victims' wellbeing. Research supports the fact that sexual assault can lead to psychological harm on the long run (Ward et al., 2018; WHO, 2010). Richards et al., (2020:7) add that general responses like social withdrawal, shame, and fear of stigma can isolate victims and prevent recovery. Public anxiety about sexual crimes also contribute to victims' fear of judgment (Burrell & Laskey, 2017:53; Levenson et al., 2007). Wemmers, Parent, and Lachance Quirion (2023:486) further argue that it is time to pay attention to victims and create creative solutions that protect the accused's rights while attending to their needs and fostering healing. With more than 433,000 rapes and sexual assaults estimated annually in the United States alone, sexual violence and its negative effects remain a serious global concern, reflecting the huge nature of this crisis (Health, cited in Tuschick et al., 2025a:1).

These storylines and the supporting literature show that participants' perceptions correctly reflect the negative impact sexual offences cause victims, highlighting the urgency for comprehensive victim-centred responses.

- **Category 2: Families get traumatised**

Sexual violence, however, not only affects the victims, but it also affects families too as portrayed in the following storylines:

"*Oh, OK. I think that the families get traumatised. They get traumatised emotionally, physically, sometimes psychologically. Even if they offend one person but it's even affecting the whole family, as some may blame one another sometimes, the victim. If the child happens to be affected, the whole family has to be in. There will be differences in the families, there will be cracks because of maybe some barriers. If it's a family member and they want justice, it will not be served by the state. They want to put things under the carpet, so there will be more cracks in the family as it will cause family division, so it has a huge negative impact". **(AM 44-54)**.*

*"When it comes to the family side, it may also be a struggle as family might also struggle to cope with the aftermath of the offence". **(BL 50-52)**.*

*"In their families, some of these survivors maybe shunned or avoided by their families after disclosing the abuse. Families may reject them and lead them astray because of what they have gone through". **(DB 35-38)**.*

*"So, the family may experience stigma within the community, and the community itself may also be stigmatised. It affects not only one person, but the entire family, neighbourhood, and community at large". **(D 49–54).***

*"So, it becomes a problem to the family. They lose touch with their relations, their relatives, because it changes their lives, and it also sometimes puts a bad tag on the family in the local communities, especially". **(AR 52-55)**.*

“I think this is the greatest offence for now, especially to the victim and the family, they will cause some hatred towards that person”. ***(GZ 57-58)****.*

“And even how they communicate with the others, victims tend to be a bit sceptical because of what they have experienced. I think that has a major impact on the victim's family. I feel it makes the family worry about the people they hang around with. Family becomes self-conscious about whom they allow their children to go to, who they even allow their wife to interact with”. ***(KA 47-50).***

“*Even to their families, especially with the affected families because when they see the perpetrator, hatred will always be there”. (****MN 93)****.*

“*Their family members, even the ones that have not yet experienced it, because they’ve acquired that trauma, and it's so uncertain. When will it happen again? Sometimes they feel like it might be a cycle in the family where it happened in the past in one of the family members, and then now it's happening. Then they develop a lot of fear and anxiety around their loved ones. Like they feel like their loved ones are helpless without them. That's how it impacts the family and, in the community”. (****NG 74-85).***

*“They will worry and stress because they would always feel they never protected their family member enough and what more could they have done to have protected their family member”. (****RA 61-63)****.*

Participants described the damaging effects of sexual offences on families; it creates trauma that extends beyond the immediate victim. They emphasised that families struggle to cope with the repercussions of the offence, and they often experience emotional, psychological, and relationship breakdowns **(AM; BL)**. Participants also further noted that the disclosure of the abuse leads to rejection or blame. Survivors sometimes were isolated within their own households, and this further intensifies the harm **(DB)**. Others explained that stigma often places a negative label on the victim and the entire family, affecting their reputation within the community **(D; AR).** Hatred, fear, and anxiety (all strong emotions) were frequently mentioned, as participants feel that families may develop long-lasting resentment towards perpetrators or develop and

ongoing feeling of helplessness in protecting loved ones **(GZ; KA; MN; NG).** Feelings of guilt and worry were also highlighted, as families question whether they could have done more to prevent the offence **(RA; SN).**

These storylines align closely with current research and academic literature, which also indicate that sexual offences can often contribute to harm beyond the direct victim, inclusive of secondary trauma, stigma, and strained family relationships. This was already established years back, as Manion, McIntyre, Firestone, Ligezinska, Ensom et al. (1996) found that the impact of sexual offence has the potential to traumatise the entire family system. These stories also support the findings of Shepp, O'Callaghan and Ullman (2019), who explain how sexual assault frequently impacts on survivors' social networks, causing secondary trauma, strained relationships, and a breakdown in cohesiveness among family members. The literature also points out that when the perpetrator is a family member or close acquaintance, the trauma can be even more severe because of family betrayal and the difficulty of disclosure, even though participants primarily focused on the wider impact on family functioning (Shepp et al., 2019).

O'Callaghan et al. (2018a), further indicate that families and close social networks bear a heavy burden after sexual offences. Friends, family, and significant others frequently face both positive and negative outcomes following disclosure. Family members frequently report feelings of stress, frustration, and emotional toll as a result of survivors' ongoing needs, even though some relationships grow stronger. In particular, significant others reported that helping survivors occasionally resulted in their own needs going unmet, which strained their relationships. According to the participants in the study of O'Callaghan et al. (2018a), sexual offences cause families to become unstable and under a great deal of stress. Similarly, participants in this study **(AM; BL; AR)** indicated that families struggle to cope, experience cracks in relationships, and carry stigma within the community. These results show that harm not only affects the victim but also those closest to them who are involved in their rehabilitation, by creating stigma, and making recovery more difficult, regardless of whether the perpetrator lives in the home.

These impacts on family-level are closely connected to broader community reactions. The instability and strain within households often spill over into the wider social environment. The next category therefore turns to how communities respond, particularly through fear, anger, and heightened mistrust.

- **Category 3: Communities living with fear and anger**

Participants described how sexual offences traumatise victims and destabilise families, but it also creates a widespread negative impact within the community, which leaves community members feeling unsafe and anxious about their social environment. This is displayed in the following narratives:

*"The communities will look at each other with that anger and bad attitude. There will be a lack of trust and fear". **(AM 56-57)**.*

*"Whereas the community may feel a sense of fear and vulnerability". **(BL 53)**.*

*"So, it affects basically not only one person, but the entire family, neighbourhood, the community at large, you know". **(D 53)**.*

*"I don't think they should be reintegrated. I think they should have a separate community, you know? Yeah, unless basically they've really, really changed. Yeah, of course. I mean, most of the time, they tend to be repeat offenders. You see. So, yeah, putting them into the same community can be very challenging and dangerous". **(D 58-64)**.*

*"It is going to be more detrimental for the people in their original community, in that sense". **(D 68–70).***

*"And it creates great hatred in the community; they would also have rage towards that person. They would stop believing in him and not trust such a person again". **(GZ 59-60)**.*

“It makes the community unsafe, so it also instils fear in the entire community”. ***(AR 64)****.*

“You become self-conscious about who you allow your child to go to and whom you allow your child to interact with. Yes, because you become more aware of certain things that you think may happen, even within the community as a whole. There is a feeling of distrust among each other because we start saying that if this person can do it, then someone else can also do it. So, there is this growing sense of distrust. If I do not know you that well, I may feel that you are capable of doing such things, so I would rather not come close to you. As a result, there is a feeling of distrust among community members because we are aware that people can do such things”. ***(KA 56–64).***

“The community itself will always see the person as a danger to their families. Yeah, within the community, it creates some sort of apathy”. ***(MN 108)****.*

“It creates a sense of apathy in the community. People live with fear. People can no longer enjoy their social lives openly, and this creates unsafe communities. People live with fear and apathy, and they can no longer enjoy a quality of life as they should. People also live with anger. The community becomes similar to a family in how it experiences these things, because behaviours occurring around them cause them to live in fear, trauma, anger, and a constant feeling of being unsafe, which limits their social activities”. ***(NG 91–105).***

Participants described the negative impact sexual offences have on their communities, highlighting feelings of fear, anger, and mistrust. Many explained that communities no longer feel safe and that social life becomes restricted due to increased caution and suspicion **(AM; BL; NG)**. Some expressed strong disagreement to reintegrating offenders into their original communities, as they believe that the offender presence poses ongoing danger and could lead to repeat offences **(D)**. Several participants emphasised that sexual offences instil deep distrust among community members. Even everyday interactions become tainted by suspicion **(KA)**. Others noted that the collective impact is emotional, social, creating apathy, fractured relations, and loss of

community cohesion **(GZ; MN)**. These narratives highlight how the harm of sexual offences expand to destabilise the entire communities.

According to research, sexual offences are high-level socio-political, policy, and community issues that cause widespread fear and negative emotions. These participant perspectives are consistent with that research (Richards et al., 2021:3). According to research, sexual offences cause more negative reactions than the majority of other crimes, frequently leading to widespread outrage and mistrust (Petreca, Flanagan, Lyons, Lyons and Burgess, 2024:1; Pickett Mancini & Mears, 2013). Klein (2015) goes on to say that communities' fear of sexual victimisation pushes them towards punitive attitudes and exclusionary practices, which can seriously hinder offenders' ability to reintegrate into society. Participants' demands that criminals be kept out of their home communities are reflected in this **(D 58–64)**. Levenson et al., (2007) discovered that public fear and anxiety frequently result in protection policies like sex offender notification and registration, which represent community efforts to protect themselves, but also serve to further stigmatisation and mistrust. According to Baker and Van Hout (2021), child sexual abuse alone costs South Africa R196 billion a year, or 4.9% of GDP. This shows that the effects of sexual offences are not just emotional and social but also have a significant financial impact. These results demonstrate how sexual offences destabilise society on several levels, echoing participants' recognition that communities are left feeling fearful, angry, stigmatised, and less cohesive.

Systems theory links well with the storylines and perspectives of participants, as it shows how sexual offences and post-sentence reintegration function across connected, open systems like individuals, family, and the community. Participants' understandings of sexual offences were shaped by inputs from their broader environment. Media often adds sensational or extreme cases, reinforcing stereotypes and public fears (Harris & Socia, 2016:1). Legal frameworks, such as the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007), provide formal definitions of offences, which inform how people judge sexual behaviour. Cultural norms and values also play a central role, influencing what behaviours are considered acceptable or unacceptable in different contexts (Levenson et al., 2007:7). From a systems theory perspective, these inputs can be seen as information flowing into the

community as an open system, which then processes them into outputs, such as participants' own definitions of sexual offending (Friedman & Allen, 2014:4; Chikere & Nwoka, 2015:1). These outputs create feedback loops: community responses of fear, stigma, and exclusion can feed back into media portrayals, legal policy debates, and cultural narratives, further shaping how sexual offences are understood and managed at different levels of society.

Building on these insights, the next theme considers how participants viewed the role of the perpetrator, and how community perceptions of offenders themselves shape responses to reintegration.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Community reaction to reintegration

This theme describes how the community responded to sex offender reintegration and the participants' thoughts and emotions after a sex offender have been released from jail. Throughout the participant discourse, two subthemes and categories that complemented the main theme surfaced (see Table 4-4).

Table 4-4 Theme 2: Community reaction to reintegration

THEMES	SUBTHEMES	CATEGORIES
Theme 2: community reaction to reintegration	Subtheme 1: Positive reactions by community	•Positive - encourages reintegration •Conflicted between concerns and accepting the perpetrator back
	Subtheme 2: Negative reactions by community	•Fear, distrust and perceived risk •Community discomfort, social distance, and stigmatisation • Emotional resistance and moral opposition to reintegration •Punitive, retaliatory, and justice-driven attitudes

Reintegration can be defined as the act of reintegrating or refitting in an individual into society after the person has served a jail sentencer. Reintegration, in the words of Braithwaite, is reintegrating the criminal into society while highlighting the person's

capacity for transformation and rehabilitation (Raju & Anthony, 2025:197). Sexually offending individuals are viewed as more dangerous than other criminals (Sample & Bray, 2003). The costs that sexual offences cause to society (such as heightened fear of crime, physical or psychological harm to the primary victim's anger, and financial expenses (Loya, 2015)) may justify such conceptualisations, but they make it difficult for those who have committed a sexual offence to reintegrate into society (Tuschick et al., 2024). How people see people with sexual convictions depends on the victim's demographics. According to Rogers, Hirst and Davies (2011), Weekes et al. (1995), Ward (2010), Rothwell et al., (2021), individuals who perpetrate crimes against children are perceived as more defiant, immoral, and generally negatively viewed than those who perpetrate crimes against adults.

Regarding the reintegration of sexual offenders, participants' feelings are conflicted. Some people have conflicting sentiments about the entire procedure, so they are unsure of what they want. Subtheme 1 depicts a positive reaction about it, whereas Subtheme 2 depicts a negative reaction.

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Positive reaction by community

In response to this subtheme, individuals showed mixed responses from the public community towards the reintegrating process. One of the responses was more positive in nature which included being second chance-oriented, supporting reintegration, and focusing on getting help for rehabilitation. The other response seemed more reserved, if not directly negative, where community members displayed indifference, anxiety, fear, or rejected the offenders all together. However, in some way or other, sexual offenders are accepted back into the community following their sentence. The following categories detail the positive perspectives and those leaning to the positive side, from the community towards reintegration of sex offenders into the community.

- **Category 1: Positive - encourages reintegration**

Some community members believe in giving someone a second chance, especially if he or she has served the term, and have a constructive attitude towards the reintegration of sex offenders, as expressed in the following:

"I don't have a problem if they have served their sentence fully. Then they come back, rehabilitated in the community, whereby they engaged in community development, and they are doing awareness about their past behavioural problems, so I don't have a problem, and I don't judge them if they are willing to". ***(AM 27-33)****.*

"It is not easy for us to welcome them back into society, but we should be open-minded. We should allow people to make mistakes and allowing them does not necessarily mean that we condone their actions. However, we should give people a second chance to prove themselves. We should not write people off instantly. If they have served their sentence and shown remorse for their actions, I think we, as human beings, should have a better impulse to give people a second chance to prove themselves again. We are giving them a chance to be part of society. We should not reject them or label them as outcasts. Instead, we should give them a second chance and let them know that they are welcome in society and that we are willing to coexist with them again harmoniously". ***(FS 39–52).***

"You know, some of them when they leave prison, become better people. They can educate themselves, and there are many things they can do so that when they return to the community, they can add value. The community may accept them or may not accept them; it depends on how remorseful they are. It is really not easy for a sex offender to be reintegrated into the community, but it depends on how useful they are and how they conduct themselves when they return, in order to be accepted". ***(MN 56–57).***

"And so, I think the community should have an open heart if they want offenders to stop their acts. The community should accept them if they confess that they have done something wrong and have changed". ***(GZ 89–93).***

"If, and only if, we can ascertain that the person is safe to be around, I think community members then play a very big role. Obviously, even though someone has served time for that offence, it does not mean that they do not deserve a second chance to make things right. I think community members play a major role in welcoming the person and making them feel accepted. As much as we understand that you did what you did, we accept you and believe that you have changed". ***(KA 89–94).***

The participants in this category provided an overall positive, but conditional reaction to offenders re-entering the community. While the accounts reflect a predominantly welcoming attitude towards sexual offenders on a surface level, the theme revealed that individuals should be held accountable for their actions and that their return must be met with efforts toward rehabilitation and remorse for the desired positive community reaction.

AM (27–33) stated that people should be accepted back into the community once the perpetrator has "finished the whole sentence" and has been "rehabilitated", noting that they would be able to "keep an open mind" about this issue as well. **FS (39–52)** also described an overall positive stance in that people should "receive an opportunity" if they "finish their jail sentence and if they are regretting" what they did. It was added that this can be "difficult to hear and hard to accept", showing that welcoming a person with a sexual offence back into the community can elicit tension in emotions**. FS** added that this approach is not equal to overlooking the offence but was based on a belief in a "second chance for people" and human dignity. This perspective, which **FS** described as a personal view, therefore suggests the general theme of positive stances being based on the idea of "giving people a second chance" and human dignity, although there is tension involved with this process as well.

MN (56–57) noted that a "better person" after a rehabilitation period can "always come back" into the community and, in the participant's opinion, would be "accepted" as well because they "can be very useful" to the community. The extent to which this is the case was linked to an offender's degree of remorse, with this return being dependent on it too. **GZ (89–93)** added that community members should have "an open heart" toward

people who accept their crime, another example of a positive stance hinging on offender change.

KA (89–94) included that community members play an important role in the reintegration process. It was added that they should “be open” to the offenders’ return, “must show” that they “believe they can change”, and that the community would “stand by their side” in this process when a person’s return to the community was a safe prospect overall.

It can be concluded that participants prefer reintegration when offenders demonstrate remorse, rehabilitation, and evidence of personal change, while also recognising the inherent challenges and emotional strains of reintegrating sexual offenders into the community.

The results of this study echo much of the existing literature on the significance of community and collective attitudes for the reintegration of sexual offenders. Burchfield and Mingus (2012), for example, note that, given the particular strength of the stigma around sexual offences, “sexually convicted individuals are in the greatest need of social support networks and access to local social capital to facilitate the re-entry process.”

The emotional ambivalence and the conditional forms of openness described by the participants can also be seen as expressions of the dilemma between protecting potential future victim-survivors and demands for harsh punishment, on the one hand, and rehabilitation and reintegration ideals, on the other. As Tuschick et al. (2025a:1) argue, many communities find themself in this position. The focus that **MN, GZ** and **KA** put on sexual offenders becoming “better people”, “adding value” and being welcomed back if they have turned their lives around can, conversely, be seen as an echo of a call for an alternative strength-based re-entry narrative in which community members are enabled to play a constructive role in offenders’ change processes (Sandbukt, 2021). However, the participants’ stress on remorse, change and safety requirements also mirrors how public attitudes and labelling can both facilitate and hinder reintegration (Harper, 2019). The idea that seems to come through in these accounts, namely that people are capable of change and it is therefore important to offer them a “second

chance", also squares with the finding of Blagden et al., (2016) that more positive attitudes towards sexual offenders are associated with incremental beliefs about offenders' potential to desist from crime.

Lastly, the participants' focus on the significance of rehabilitation and structure is corroborated by research showing that the risk of sexual re-offending wanes with time, decreases with age and can be further curbed if treatment is provided and socially supportive community networks are established (Scoones, Willis & Grace, 2011). Taken together, the literature reviewed here lends support to the participants' view that a form of conditional acceptance predicated on demonstrated change and community support is both a realistic and evidence-based position to take on the reintegration of sexual offenders.

- **Category 2: Conflicted between concerns and accepting the perpetrator back**

Some participants are conflicted about sex offender reintegration because they have serious worries and do not believe that reintegration will not cost them anything. The narratives below describe how they express themselves in this regard:

"As part of the community, I feel that it is natural for us as community members to be concerned and uneasy about sex offenders living in our neighbourhoods, especially if we have children or vulnerable family members. However, it is also essential to recognise that most sex offenders have served their sentences and are attempting to reintegrate into society". ***(BL 26–30).***

*"As much as we don't feel comfortable around them, we have to accommodate them****". (BL 36)****.*

"I think they must be provided with social support and acceptance. They should be mentored in some of these issues, and there should also be opportunities such as apprenticeships. Jobs should be created for them, because sometimes those feelings may resurface when they are not occupied, when they are lonely or alone. Therefore,

education should be promoted, and a safe and supportive environment should be created". ***(DB 61–69).***

"They are going through the correctional system and are being, or have been, reformed. They should not necessarily be a problem to live with. After all, we all make mistakes and are likely to change. However, you cannot predict whether they have truly changed or are likely to offend again. It becomes difficult living with people who are struggling emotionally, because certain triggers may push them to reoffend. People tend to live with such individuals with caution, and sometimes, because others shy away from them, they become isolated. As a result, they may commit more crimes because they do not feel accepted and feel that they have nothing that brings them happiness or helps them survive, which is also not good. Therefore, I think we as a society have to welcome them, let them feel at home, and help them realise that what they did was truly wrong, while also understanding why they have now been granted the liberty to live among us again". ***(AR 77–95).***

"I look at it from both sides: the side of the person against whom the crime was committed and the side of the offender, because some people just need a second chance. For people to change, they need love, trust, and support, so it may not be okay to cast them out. At the same time, we know that people need second chances, but we must also consider the pain of someone who was assaulted. This is very painful for me, and I have mixed feelings about this issue because I am caught between who should do what and who should not. At the end of the day, both parties need attention, though not necessarily equal attention. I think the person who should be prioritised is the one who was offended by the crime. Perhaps, for both parties to recover and move on with their lives, they should be kept far apart from each other". ***(SIHLE 35–53).***

In all of the above storylines, sexual offenders, in some way or other, are accepted back into the community following their sentence. The storyline owners demonstrate a rather positive but by no means certain or confident approach to reintegrating sexual offenders. When compared with the opening storylines in Category 1, the latter storylines are more emotionally charged (negative, but also positive), more hesitant,

and thus are indicative of a more negative emotional tone. These feelings can be roughly summarised as vacillating between acceptance of the offenders' 'right to re-enter the community' and the distress and anxiety stemming from the feelings of fear, unpredictability, and empathy for victims' plight.

The ambivalence of **BL (26–30)** is partly expressed in the linkage between fear or concern that is 'natural' (especially if children and vulnerable adults are around) and the offenders' right to re-enter the community, having "served their sentence**". BL (36)** goes even further, by both acknowledging that the community "don't feel comfortable" and accepting that offenders "have to accommodate" them. In other words, offenders' re-entry into the community, as far as this participant is concerned, is a desired outcome, but it is desired for largely civic rather than convictional reasons.

DB (61–69) holds a two-pronged position, suggesting support for the social worker's points by offering advice and life skills training, mentoring, and even job-seeking assistance but basing this position predominantly on the risk factor. The main argument for this recommendation is that not offering such support to the offenders may cause negative feelings to emerge again and, in the absence of these support structures, the above-mentioned risks are indeed likely to materialise. This storyline, however, is noticeably less positive and hopeful than before.

D (29–33) injects a measure of emotion and compassion into the storyline, most notably empathy for the plight of victims, who are said to "carry that day in [their] mind" whereas the offender "goes scot-free". It would be an exaggeration to suggest that **(D)** outrightly opposes reintegration; however, it can be reasonably suggested that a feeling of moral distress accompanies **D's** apparent acquiescence to reintegration.

AR (77–95) also exhibits a vacillation between support for reintegration and anxiety regarding the potential risks posed by this cohort. On the one hand, **AR** says that it "should not be a problem" to re-enter the community if the person in question is "really reformed". However, the participant also makes it clear that s(he) considers it a very difficult call to make, in that it is impossible to know whether a person is "changed" or not. This, in turn, may cause a problem for community life in general. In this respect, the

fact that (**AR)** also acknowledges that the offenders are more likely to reoffend if the community rejects them is indicative of **(AR's)** overall position that this is not a zero-sum game and both acceptance and rejection are fraught with risk.

SIHLE (35–53) is by far the most ambivalent of all. On the one hand, this participant offers a rather or perfectly balanced assessment, saying that both "offenders and victim have need for love" but the victims come first. It is equally clear that **SIHLE** needs to support the offender in finding trust and new beginnings but also states that re-entry into the community, for this participant, is "really painful" to even think about. In essence, (**SIHLE)** can be said to be torn by compassion on both sides but is still able to supply a reasonable perspective on the question at hand.

In sum, the current storylines provide, despite being more emotionally variegated than those provided in Category 1, a more positive (but not unreservedly so) opinion and thus an accepting attitude of reintegration of sexual offenders in the community. However, the participants' feelings and convictions are also marked by negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, empathy, and moral distress, stemming from a range of sources, including risks, the victims' plight, and uncertainty about the right approach to this cohort.

Storylines of this ambivalent-but-still-cautiously-positive type are the ones that most closely reflect the current body of scholarship on the subject of the public's perceptions of the reintegration of sexual offenders. More specifically, they touch upon all the points mentioned in the literature: the community tension between gut reactions of emotional unease, the logical counterpoint of acknowledging offenders' right to re-entry support post-punishment and indications that they have reformed, and the impact of broader public narratives in influencing this process of a challenging reconciliation of conflicting intuitions. Recurrent storylines within the group of these participants echo or map almost directly onto the social dynamics discussed in the body of literature.

McCartan, Kemshall and Tabachnick (2015) posit that the type of knowledge that people have access to regarding sexual offenders is a key determinant of their perceptions. They go on to show that participants in their study whose views were not informed by

media-inspired or community-reproduced assumptions, but by research-based information were more likely to have a balanced and measured understanding of reintegration. The parallel with the storylines offered by **BL, DB** and **AR** is plain to see: a more-or-less explicit attempt to at least in part rationalise their gut-level emotional reactions by approaching the topic from a more holistic perspective of rehabilitation, community safety, and the importance of supportive community structures in the prevention of recidivism. This also may speak to the impact of specific knowledge on the attitudes of this group of participants, given that they appear to be not only accepting reintegration as a logical premise but also willing to distinguish between people and offenders that they personally do not feel have changed.

Tuschick et al. (2025a:1) expound on this point by explaining that public reactions in this regard are in fact less monolithic and feature competing, even contradictory, impulses. While some participants mention support for rehabilitation and reintegration, others indicate a desire to punish and express doubts about sexual offenders' capacity for change. These impulses are recognisably present in **SIHLE's** mixed feelings, **BL's** uneasy acceptance and **D's** empathy for victims being at odds with their stances on reintegration. The pattern among the last of these three groups of participants is similar to the observations made in the research: the ambivalence on the individual level mirrors the community-level fluctuations between the desire to accept people back into society as a social good and the counter-reactions of worry about safety and scepticism regarding rehabilitation.

The next factor to consider here is the presence of community narratives. Cosby (2022) notes that social myths of sexual offenders can contribute to the public's distorted perceptions of them, with the exaggerated focus on the issues of danger, predatory behaviour and reoffending contributing to the fear of these individuals and a lower level of community acceptance for their reintegration. These themes are featured prominently in the comment by **AR**, who emphasises the potential unreliability of offenders' behaviour changes and the fear of reoffending being triggered, which is at the centre of **AR's** conflict over supporting the idea of reintegration. The unease over accepting people who committed sexual crimes is reflected in the references by these participants to the perceived difficulty of discerning 'good people' from 'bad people' and is not

unrelated to the community image of sexual offenders as unpredictable and dangerous. It also showcases the logic of community rejection in this regard: by objectifying people in this way, sexual offenders are so strongly stigmatised within the community that it becomes easier to reconcile the competing intuitions of unease and empathy.

The final point to make here is that this ambivalence about sexual offender reintegration, including the fear and negative social stigma within it, have tangible social and criminological impacts. Lawrence and Willis (2021) caution that continuing to treat people who committed sexual crimes in punitive ways within the community can increase the likelihood of additional offences and future harm. Stansfield, Mowen, O'Connor and Boman (2017) provide evidence that reintegrative community support, including that from religious groups, helps ex-offenders adjust and decreases the risk of reoffending. These are the points reflected in the participants' insights, including the comment by **DB** and **AR** on isolation pushing people back into negative behaviour patterns, the perceived importance of mentorship and support, and the statement by **DB** that people "have to be given a second chance".

In conclusion, it is clear that the storylines that the ambivalent-but-still-cautiously-positive group offered in this study, overlap with the literature on the community perceptions of sexual offender reintegration. The participants' responses demonstrate compassion, fear, moral dilemma, logic and the broader community influences in this complex emotional process, and all of those aspects are recognised in the scholarly literature.

4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Negative reaction by community

There is mounting evidence that treatment during the sentence can help mitigate the risk of reoffending, but the public's understanding of sexual offenders is still based on fear, distrust, and many stereotypes. Wolf (2021) points out that treatment programmes' effectiveness on recidivism rates can be assessed. For instance, according to Soldino and Carbonell-Vayá (2017), the recidivism of untreated sex offenders was found to be around 17.94%. For those who completed a treatment programme, the figure was 13.12%. At the same time, research on recidivism is often contradictory, with some

studies yielding higher and others lower estimates, resulting in a lack of clarity and increased scepticism (Lussier, Chouinard Thivierge, Fréchette & Proulx, 2024). This creates a myth that all sex offenders are dangerous, have a high risk of reoffending, and are untreatable.

These negative perceptions are further reinforced by the high social, psychological, and economic costs of sexual violence to both victims and communities. It is widely perceived that sex offenders are more dangerous than other types of offenders, which in part is based on higher levels of fear of crime, anger, and long-term trauma that victim-survivors experience (Loya, 2015; Sample & Bray, 2003; Tuschick et al., 2024). These social factors also make reintegration difficult for many, as most individuals with sexual convictions need structured support following the sentence, although it is worth mentioning that those with a high risk of reoffending are more likely to commit an offence in the first few years following their release (Hanson et al., as cited in Richards et al., 2020), which is only a small proportion of the total population. However, given the community's perception of all sexual offenders as highly likely to reoffend, the release of such individuals is usually met with resistance.

In the current study, the participants showed a range of negative reactions to reintegration, which were classified into four categories: fear and distrust, social discomfort and stigmatisation, emotional resistance, and retaliatory or punitive attitudes.

- **Category 1: Fear, distrust, and perceived risk**

Because of the nature of the crime conducted by sex offenders it makes it difficult for people to trust them again. The foundation of initiatives to promote health equity through community involvement is trust (Lansing, Romero, Siantz, Silva, Center et al., 2023:1). Participants voiced their opinions about it as follows:

"OK, on my side I have a bad feeling about the sex offenders. I feel that we are not safe because if he can do it to part A or someone, he can also even do it to me or to my fellow brother or sister. So, I do not feel safe at all and everyone is at risk, including children". ***(DB 53–57)****.*

"This is a big problem; they become a threat to people in the community and everyone else especially ladies in the community we become so afraid. Because nobody knows when his instance or his tendencies to abuse people sexually will be triggered. So, people live in the community with a lot of fear around such people". ***(AR 29–33)****.*

"Your emotions are going to be everywhere. The community will never trust you". ***(SIHLE81).***

"For that one, it is a dicey one… It is hard for the community to accept them because we do not truly and fully serve the sentence they deserve. Welcoming them becomes a bit dicey due to the reliance on the justice system". ***(FS 15–22)***

"I am biased, and I want to keep my distance from them… being associated with someone who is doing something wrong can be challenging. Even socialising with them would imply that you are part of that person's actions or approve that behaviour. So, I will keep my distance". ***(GZ 44–47)****.*

"My feelings are more of a distrust. Someone who has done that shows that they are capable of doing that again. It makes it very uncomfortable to be around such people". ***(KA 32–41)****.*

Participants describe or see re-integrated offenders as continual threats, a possible unpredictable risk. They described feeling fear around returning sexual offenders. Descriptions of fear were related to one's own safety and the safety of others (such as vulnerable people or children), and fears around what may trigger offenders for example **(AR, DL)**. Vulnerability to the risk posed by returning sexual offenders is described by **DB** and **AR** as an emotional outcome, and specifically how communities (particularly women) may feel more vulnerable because of their return. **SIHLE** and **KA** also speak about feelings of distrust and state that trust cannot be regained after an offence of this nature has been committed. This is again followed by discussions about a lack of trust in the justice system. For example**, FS** describes a situation where offenders did not receive complete sentences, and how this can leave communities feeling unsafe or as if it was too early for the offender to return (indicating a lack of trust).

Disengagement from offenders was mentioned by some participants as a result of their emotional response. This includes strategies of avoidance and social withdrawal from offenders as a method to protect themselves (for example, **GZ** explains their feelings about not wanting to be aligned to the person who committed a wrongful act). The comments by the participants are reflective of emotional self-monitoring and the impact of fear.

There is strong alignment between the storylines of the participants' and their expressions of fear and the research describing persistent negative emotions toward sexual offenders. The criteria for 'trust', 'intent', and 'social distance' defined by Hogue (2017) were all visible in the emotional (affective mistrust: "the community will never trust you"), cognitive ("they are capable of doing that again"), and behavioural ("I will keep my distance") responses of the participants. The public shaming and moral disapproval of sexual offenders that Bastian et al. (2013) and Petreca, Flanagan, Lyons, Lyons and Burgess (2024) documented is directly related to the participants' view of sexual offenders as a current moral and social threat.

The assumptions that individuals have about sexual offenders are that they will reoffend, and they are inherently predisposed to reoffend (Budd, 2024; Jordaan & Hesselink, 2018), and the fears about this that **DB, AR** and **KA** experience in particular. Community public protests can also be another sign that individuals are not accepted by the community. Williams (2018) has a concept for this, which is the "not-in-my-backyard" sentiment our participants are expressing in their answers.

- **Category 2: Community discomfort, social distance, and stigmatisation**

The participants express their negative feelings about the reintegration of sexual offenders into society. As stated above, sexual offences have increasingly become a widely recognised source of social unrest and collective anxiety (Almeida, Santos, Moreira, Araujo, Barros et al., 2022:1). This kind of violence is believed to be one of the most serious and damaging kinds of violence in society, as it impacts not only on the physical and psychological integrity of the victims, but also on their families. In this

context, participants expressed different reactions of social discomfort, distancing and stigmatisation that ground the second category as follows:

"I am biased, and I want to keep my distance from them… being associated with someone who is doing something wrong can be challenging. Even socialising with them would imply that you are part of that person's actions or approve that behaviour. So, I'll keep my distance". ***(GZ 44–47)****.*

"My feeling towards them is more of a distrust as it makes it very uncomfortable to be around such people". ***(KA 32–41)****.*

*"People shy away from them, they tend to be isolated, and they do commit more crimes because they don't feel accepted". (****AR 77–95)****.*

"Your emotions are going to be everywhere. The community will never trust you". ***(SIHLE 81)****.*

"It becomes a problem people always live with such individuals with caution". ***(AR 29–33).***

In these narratives participants expressed feelings of social awkwardness, disassociation from, and/or avoidance of sex offenders. In Category 1 participants expressed fear or felt unsafe around sex offenders, whereas this category describes the social and interpersonal implications of re-entering the community, even when participants do not necessarily feel unsafe. Participants expressed that they did not want to be associated with or around offenders in order to avoid issues with their reputation, feeling dirty or tainted, or just feeling socially uncomfortable.

GZ (44–47) explicitly states a desire to "keep [a] distance" based on fears of being socially linked to wrongdoing. **KA (32–41)** similarly emphasises discomfort rather than fear, expressing reluctance to interact because of the offender's past actions. **AR (77–95)** accentuates how stigma and social avoidance can lead to offender isolation. This reflects a cycle in which community withdrawal reinforces marginalisation and, in some

cases, may worsen the risk of further offending. The view of **SIHLE (81)** view adds that emotional responses are complex and overwhelming, from which it can be concluded that “the community will never trust you”, showing clearly the extent and depth of social rejection.

These responses also show that stigmatisation results in social avoidance and disassociation in addition to fear. This negative reaction is well corroborated by literature which describes stigmatisation, social isolation, and relational distancing as core impediments to reintegration (Liamputtong & Rice, 2021; Mahlangu & Kgadima, 2021).

Burrell and Laskey (2017) point out that stigma and public safety concerns pose significant re-entry barriers, which echo the participants’ inclination to put distance between themselves and offenders to avoid discomfort or reputational risks. Klein (2015) similarly describes sexual offenders as “reviled” and notes they are often harassed and forced into homelessness or unemployment as a result of community rejection. This also relates to **GZ’s** explicit desire to “keep distance” and **AR’s** point that community members “shy away” from offenders and distance themselves from them.

Chikadzi (2017) points out in this South African study that ex-offenders are often rejected by their families and communities, pushing them into the company of other offenders – a point that **AR (77–95)** conveys more directly when explaining that isolation can lead people to reoffend. Kyprianides, Easterbrook and Cruwys (2019) also note that labelled people face entrenched discrimination and exclusion, even when community members claim to support rehabilitation policies. This is reinforced by Rade et al. (2017), who found that people can be in favour of reintegrative interventions on the policy level but avoid having to personally interact with offenders – a point that aligns closely with **KA’s** and **SIHLE’s** accounts of personal discomfort and a lack of trust.

A further key reference is Braithwaite’s (1989) disintegrative shaming concept, which suggests that offenders who are outcast (rather than reintegrated through restorative means) will socially withdraw, increasing shame and isolation. Bailey and Klein (2018) found that people with sexual offence convictions report much higher social isolation and shame scores, which lines up with many participants’ claims that communities do

not trust offenders and try to put distance between themselves and them. These sources thus show that social discomfort and avoidance are not idiosyncratic attitudes but rather part of a well-established stigma-driven distancing pattern that sexual offender experience in many settings.

This category emphasises participants' fear of harm, as well as their feelings of stigma and social disconnection. Participants express a strong desire to distance themselves from registered sex-offenders. In particular, they do not want to have sex-offenders in their neighbourhood because they wish to protect themselves from potential harm. They also wish to protect their identity as a good person and their position in the community. In literature, distancing is noted as a major impediment to reintegration. It can lead to isolation and shame and undermine rehabilitation efforts. As such, stigmatisation acts both as a driver and as an outcome of community anxiety.

- **Category 3: Emotional resistance and moral opposition to reintegration**

Responses in this category indicate a move away from fear or social sanctions and instead focus on feelings that are more moral or ethical in nature. Community members' responses were based not simply on the level of risk but on justice, equity, and moral concerns. These responses were based on the impact of sexual offences, the nature of the offence, and the idea that reintegration might be damaging or devalue communal rights or victim rights. As such, this is the category where the most intense levels of moral disgust, outrage, and value or principle-based resistance to reintegration are present, with participants expressing it as follows:

"That is a huge danger. They are as good as murderers. So, reintegrating them to the community will only cause the community more anxiety, especially the victims and their families of the victims". **(NG 131–134)**.

"The community get so defeated when these people are released". **(NG 198)**.

"It depends on the readiness of the community. We cannot write a person off because of any act, and we cannot judge a person solely based on one action. However, I feel

that reintegration is a good thing, although certain aspects must be considered. For example, the minds of community members must be prepared. They must be made aware and ready to see a person who may be perceived as an animal—someone who has killed a person or taken away the dreams of a child or even an elderly person. An elderly person must still be treated with dignity, as they have value in the community. I feel it is better to prepare the community than to suddenly see a person out of custody without the community knowing how that happened. Questions must be asked, such as whether this person received enough support from correctional services. I deliberately use the term correctional services because the aim is correction. Preparing the community is a good step, and if the community is not prepared, it must be prepared. This process will benefit both the individual and everyone else, so that living alongside that person does not become emotionally and psychologically exhausting for the community". ***(FM 120–140).***

"I just feel bad for the victims because they will always carry that memory with them, while the offenders seem to go scot-free. So, yes, I feel more for the victims". ***(D 29–33).***

"I think, firstly, we need to agree that these fears are valid, because if someone has committed such an act, then being scared is understandable. To address misconduct and misconceptions, we must approach the issue with the mindset that the fear of community members is valid. It is valid for them to be afraid that someone who committed such an act is back in the community". ***(KA 106–112).***

This category is strongly associated with emotional resistance and moral rejection. Participants made references to empathy for victims, injustice and victim-survivor disregard, and community unpreparedness for reintegration. Unlike participants in Categories 1 and 2, there were many fewer associations with personal fear and social discomfort, and a much greater number of clear value-based objections in this category.

NG (131–134) specifically cited the long-term effects of the sexual offending on victims to determine that they were "the same as murder" and that reintegrating offenders "just makes the rest of the community fearful. Especially any victim-survivors that are

around**". D (29–33)** also stated, "I think that it's [sexual offending] worse, long term for the emotional trauma that the victims must go through. And the offender then kind of goes scot-free, I guess. I can see the community being against that as well". **NN (160–165)** said the community may view reintegrating offenders as having "more rights" than victim-survivors, which many other participants also thought would lead to more risk or more community unacceptance.

FM (120–140) stated that reintegration into an unprepared community can result in even more tension, moral outrage, and psychological problems. **KA (106–112)** said that it was not just a personal fear, but rather an objectively reasonable fear. These storylines revealed that participants also based their emotions about reintegration (or resistance to it) not just on risk or social discomfort, but also on moral judgments.

Literature on sexual offenders and reintegration reveals a consensus with the interviewee's findings: communities are more likely to morally and emotionally reject the reintegration of sexual offenders. Loya (2015) found that the severity and irreversible nature of sexual crimes result in strong public resentment and moral objections. This aligns with **NG's** assertion that "it's as good as murderers" and **FM's** comments that the public view offenders as "animals". Tuschick et al. (2024) state that such moral repugnance often prompts members of the public to support punitive or ostracising responses rather than reintegration. This mirrors the participant's views that the reintegration of sexual offenders gives rights to criminals rather than rights to the victims **(NN 160–165).**

The literature on South African responses to reintegrating offenders confirms the participants' forceful moral opposition to reintegrating sexual offenders. Hesselink and Dastile's (2015) empirical study of reintegration identified that sexual offenders are most emotionally repugnant to South African communities, who commonly deemed reintegration as inappropriate, unsafe, or morally unacceptable given the perceived severity and irreparable harm of sexual offences. Hesselink and Dastile's (2015) findings on negative public perceptions towards reintegrating sex offenders are helpfully reframed in Lotter's (2022) cultural critique of South Africa as a stigmatising shaming culture, where criminal offenders experience deep-seated marginalisation, moral

labelling, and symbolic exclusion. Lotter (2022) account critiques traditional rehabilitation as a functionalist endeavour that overlooks structural inequities, harsh community sentiments, and political distortions which contour local responses to crime. As such, stigmatisation is culturally mobilised as a form of violence, branding offenders as irredeemably deviant and undeserving of reintegration in South African society. This echoes participants' beliefs that reintegrating sex offenders may dishonour victims, destabilise community morality, and ostracise victims, as sexual offenders are stigmatised as 'outsiders' unworthy of 'good society'. Lotter (2022) article also notes that stigma makes reintegration unattainable when communities project enduring shame and suspicion onto ex-offenders, leading to self-fulfilling prophecies of exclusion and recidivism, similar to participants' views that the community is 'not ready' or is emotionally unwilling to reintegrate them. The literature on stigmatisation, reintegration, and South Africa together shows that community resistance is not only about risk, but also reflects the structural, cultural, and moral dynamics of stigma and exclusion in South Africa.

International literature reiterates the South African consensus. For instance, Gross (2017) and Edwards and Mottarella (2014) found that sexual offenders received "the most severe negative attention" in general (Edwards, & Mottarella, 2014). This is largely due to the nature of the offence and its symbolic threat to communal values, similar to **NG's** and **D's** arguments that reintegration causes anxiety and undermines the community's sense of justice.

Another frequently reported belief that drives moral rejection is the perception that sexual offenders are more likely to reoffend, which is not supported by research (Budd, 2024; Sample & Bray, 2003). The intensity of affective opposition identified among participants aligns with research indicating that the general public often advocates for more severe punishments and stricter corrections for sexual offenders, given perceptions that responses to these crimes are insufficient (Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur & Hough, in Klein & McKissick, 2019). Klein and McKissick's (2019) application of Cohen's (1972; 2002) moral panic theory also illuminates how sexual offenders have been constructed as contemporary "folk devils", in that they are publicly depicted as highly deviant, morally threatening, and undermining to the social order. In moral panics,

these sentiments are often amplified by the media, heightened by “sensationalist reporting, fearmongering political rhetoric and social media commentary” and are communicated to the public in ways that provoke strong feelings of anger, hostility and moral disgust (Klein & McKissick, 2019). This pattern of fear, hostility and sentiment maps on to participants’ description of sexual offenders as “as good as murderers” or as “animals”, as well as their perceptions that reintegration transgresses moral boundaries, and leaves communities feeling “defeated”. Moral panic theory also helps to explain how the community’s response to these offenders may escalate to levels of punishment or hostility that are not commensurate with the actual risk they pose and are thus more a reflection of anxiety, outrage and symbolic threat than the facts of the situation (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, Sample et al., in Klein & McKissick, 2019). The processes of concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility are evidenced in participants’ narratives where reintegration is met with moral outrage, consensus that sexual offenders are unforgivable, and heightened calls for exclusion or punishment. These responses therefore parallel a broader socio-cultural pattern in which sexual offenders are the target of collective fear, anger, and moral resistance.

One issue that is undoubtedly concerning, according to Burrell and Laskey (2017:64), is how sexual offenders are supposed to reintegrate into society, given that a sizable portion of the populace has such strong negative opinions about them. A significant obstacle to the successful reintegration of released prisoners into society has been stigmatisation, mainly because of the heightened ostracism and public security concerns. Furthermore, the dread of reoffending has been extended to offenders' housing, employment, and return to school, as well as to re-establishing ties with the community for social and personal development (Sakib, 2022:2). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that sexual offences and those who commit them are a persistent source of concern for the community (Bollinger, Seidler & Kemp, 2012; Devilly & Le Grand, cited by Richards et al., 2020:7).

In synthesis, the storylines included in this category show how emotional and moral resistance against reintegration efforts is a salient experience for the group. Sexual offending was perceived as a serious and moral violation of social norms and values that evoked feelings of moral outrage and the belief that reintegration might cause

dishonour to victim-survivors and put the social stability of communities at risk. This finding is in line with research literature that shows how emotional and moral reactions to sexual offenders are common in South African and other global contexts, and that negative community attitudes are informed by harsh stigmatisation, moral panic and cultural shaming of those convicted of sexual offences. This finding further indicates that reintegration is not just a pragmatic, technical' endeavour, but that it is a process that is situated within a moral, cultural and structural landscape that amplifies rejection.

- **Category 4: Punitive, retaliatory, and justice-driven attitudes**

The nature of the crime committed by the offenders elicits anger and unfavourable views from community members, prompting them to seek revenge while accepting the sex offender back into the community. Attitudes which fall under this subcategory are not strictly based on fear or discomfort but rather consist of a feeling of needing to punish, hold someone accountable, or retaliate. This is in contrast with the second category, emotional response, which is not based on actions but moral indignation. The general theme in this category was a desire to act against someone who has been convicted of a sexual offence, whether through surveillance, incarceration, rehabilitation, or other means. This sense of action taken by or given to the community was based on a number of things, including a feeling that the criminal justice system having failed them or it not being a trusted or efficient method of punishment, as well as anger, distrust, or a desire to inflict harm on a person who has caused harm to others or potentially could do so in the future. The plotlines about it are as follows:

"Fostering a culture of empathy and understanding, while also prioritising community safety and victim support". ***(BL 130-131)****.*

"Public should be empowered to report people who do that, so that the police or the security agent can protect those who raise the red flags, so that they don't become targets of attacks, so people can report it". ***(AR 146-148).***

“So, when that trust between the security agencies and the communal members is built, it will make everybody feel safe, so even if somebody tends to do that, he will refrain because he knows that he will not be shielded”. ***(AR 151-153).***

“As I said earlier, the community must be ready and must be prepared, and it must be workshopped”. ***(FM 184).***

“At some point, you will find that some community members claim revenge”. ***(SIHLE 177–178).***

Storylines showed a need for punishment, or regulation to mediate offender reintegration (for example, where there is a loss of community trust/confidence in the effectiveness of correctional services, or offender rehabilitation). **AR (146–153)** advocates for a stronger reporting system and community empowerment, and "visible police protection" to "tie [the offender] down" so that the person does not reoffend. Here, reintegration is only considered when rigid systems of surveillance and accountability are established. This lack of trust, or conditional acceptance of offender reintegration is also implied by **SIHLE (177–178),** where some community members are reported to resort to revenge. This speaks to the existence of vengeful urges in some when victims or other community members are not satisfied with a punishment outcome.

BL (130–131) conveys the need for community safety in spite of, or in addition to, efforts to encourage empathy and suggests an assumption that offender reintegration must be subservient to victim protection. **FM (184)** shares a need for community "workshopping" and preparation. This presumes that offender reintegration is only acceptable when the community is fully prepared to work with and keep an eye on the offender. So, together, these storylines centre a justice focused process of punishment, regulation and community/public protection.

This punitive and retaliatory orientation has been largely supported by South African and international research. Burrell and Laskey (2017) found that sexual offenders are often subject to additional scrutiny and ostracism based on the notion that harsh treatment is necessary for community safety. Klein and McKissick (2019) also found

that the general public were more likely to suggest increasing sentence lengths and improving supervision, particularly in the absence of rehabilitation trust. These accounts resonate with **AR's** reference to increased reporting and law enforcement engagement.

Research on punitive stances in South Africa generally converges with these findings. Hesselink and Dastile (2015) state that in South Africa punitive measures are often community-endorsed as sexual offending is perceived to be a "grave moral violation that required more than rehabilitative measures to be addressed." Chikadzi (2017:239) echos this sentiment as their respondents are found to refer to a preference for surveillance-oriented or ostracism-based measures when reintegration is not believed to be feasible for the purpose of community protection. Lotter's (2022) conceptualisation of South Africa as a stigmatising shaming culture may also speak to this issue, as punitive sentiment is fuelled by sexual offenders' portrayal as morally depraved and not fit for reintegration. By positioning offenders as morally reprehensible, **SIHLE** legitimises disciplinary, controlling, and even informal punitive action. **SIHLE's** reference to revenge aligns with Lotters (2022) discussion on how stigmatising cultures perpetuate violence and retaliatory sentiment.

In terms of international literature, the consistent finding is that sexual offenders receive the harshest community condemnation when compared to other offender groups. Gross (2017), Edwards and Mottarella (2014), and Burchfield and Mingus (2012) all comment that the especially horrific nature of sex crimes and the overall presence of anger in society leads to the endorsement of punitive approaches and the rejection of reintegration. These accounts parallel participants' sentiment that reintegration threatens to cause injustice, ignore victims, and weaken community safety.

The reactions of participants, both for and against the reintegration of individuals convicted of sexual offences, can be understood through Bronfenbrenner's EST, which states that reactions are not formed in isolation. Human behaviour, including beliefs and attitudes, is influenced by social interactions across various levels of the environment, such as family, community, social institutions, and cultural narratives (Guy-Evans, 2024).

This aligns with the EST, which emphasises that individual development and responses are shaped by dynamic interactions between the individual and their environment, also known as proximal processes (Mourão, Sousa, Ferreira, Gonçalves, Caridade et al., 2025).

On the microsystem level, participants' positive responses, such as the support of second chances, can be linked to their personal values, empathy, or belief in the possibility of change. In contrast, negative reactions are informed by fears about the safety of children and families, as well as loved ones. On the mesosystem level, responses are influenced by interactions between households, communities, and correctional services. The level of trust between these actors determines whether the response will be acceptance or resistance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Richards et al., 2020; Zondi, 2012; Gross, 2017; & Carter et al., 2004).

The exosystem is also a significant factor in determining the response of the community as systems such as media reporting of crimes, criminal justice and correctional policies, and practices also influence attitudes and responses, even if the community is not directly involved in those interactions. Negative reporting and doubts about the effectiveness of rehabilitation can fuel the perception that offenders are dangerous, unlikely to change, and not deserving of reintegration (Mourão et al., 2025). The macrosystem level also plays a critical role in shaping responses through cultural norms and values. Ubuntu and beliefs in dignity and humaneness will support reintegration, but strong moral codes, stigma, and fear of social desirability may lead to rejection and punitive views. At the chronosystem level, factors such as historical trauma, exposure to crime, and a generalised distrust in institutions influence emotional resistance over time (Russell et al., 2022a).

4.3.3 Theme 3: Managing the reintegration process

This theme is about participants' views on the reintegration of sexual offenders into the community where they live (see Table 4-4). In line with the statements made, the subthemes suggest participants were not ambiguous on how they feel offenders should be reintegrated into society. Participants believed that it was important for offenders to

reintegrate into the community but also explained that it should happen under certain conditions and with certain protective measures in place. The following subthemes as depicted in Table 4-5 are linked to how victims should be protected, how communities are to be involved, what they felt were key areas in preventing sexual offending, how reintegration should happen and situations where participants felt reintegration should not happen. In their views, it is stated that reintegration is more than a process or procedure, but something that is more multifaceted and complex in nature. It is suggested that processes should be clearly thought out, timeously executed, communicated and should involve other stakeholders for it to be successful.

THEMES	SUBTHEMES	CATEGORIES
Theme 3: Managing the reintegration process	Subtheme 1 Recognition of the respect for the victim's position	
	Subtheme 2: Community support	
	Subtheme 3: Education and awareness programmes	
	Subtheme 4: Accountability of perpetrator	
	Subtheme 5: Not allowing perpetrators back into the community	

Table 4-5 Theme 3: Managing the reintegration process

Reintegration is aimed at offenders, but the needs and protection of the victim should also be included in the process (McAlinden, 2016:16). Furthermore, there have been successful programmes that reduce risk and help with desistance. These programmes include the Circles of Support and Accountability, which have had success in reducing risk, supporting desistance and collaborating with families and communities (Bates et al., 2012; Höing et al., 2016; Wilson & Fox, 2019). In South Africa, the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 (RSA, 1998) and the White Paper on Corrections (2005) DCS. (2005) reiterate the need for different agencies of the state, NGO's, families and traditional community structures to play a role in offender reintegration in a manner that can be safe for all those involved (Chikadzi et al., 2022:3). In line with the above statements, the following subthemes provide further insights as to how community members believe sexual offenders should be reintegrated: recognition of and respect

for the victim's position, community support, education and awareness programmes, accountability of perpetrator, and not allowing the perpetrator back into the community.

4.3.3.1Subtheme 1: Recognition of and respect for the victim's position

The stories under this subtheme indicate that participants in the study felt that reintegration should start with the needs, rights and emotional readiness of the victim. The protection of victims from any additional harm, respect for the decisions of the victims and acknowledgement of the emotional devastation of sexual crimes should be at the centre of any reintegration plan. Participants in the study did not see reintegration as the offender's right to be reintegrated into the community through the wheels of justice; it was a process that should be slow and take into consideration the victims' feelings of safety and wellbeing. Participants explained it as follows:

"It is sad that when reintegration is happening, both parties must be involved. The victims should be recognised and respected at all times during the reintegration process". ***(AM 67–77)***

"I always think of the victim's safety and wellbeing. In reintegration planning, there should be ongoing support and counselling provided to help victims cope with the aftermath of the offence". ***(BL 142–145).***

"It is also important to give the victim time. As much as offenders have reintegration rights, the process cannot work on the offender's terms. The victim is the one most affected. So, if the victim says no, that decision must be respected. It means the victim is not ready for reintegration, because it would take a toll on them". ***(D 109–116).***

"Yes, at this stage, victims are very vulnerable, and their reputation is at stake. They may have lost their dignity, so what should be done? If the victim is a minor, their identity should be limited to those directly involved, such as those prosecuting the matter or professionals offering support, including psychologists and social workers. Only those directly involved should have access, so that the identity of the minor is always protected and the victim is not stigmatised. However, this also places pressure on them as they

reintegrate into society. Families should try to help victims move their minds away from what happened, not constantly reminding them of the incident, but instead drawing their attention to the positive side of life. Although it was an unfortunate event, victims can overcome it by focusing on what is more important in life. Families therefore have a crucial role in showing more love and attention to victims and engaging them in productive activities, rather than constantly reminding them of what they went through. In addition, the government and responsible agencies need to provide support and healthcare services so that victims' needs are met". ***(AR 159–181).***

"The process itself can feel harassing, so we must be sensitive to the victim's trauma. The offender should not come near the community if the victim is not ready". ***(FM 228–290).***

*"Victims should feel safe, with distance maintained between them and the offender… support and counselling are crucial so they can move forward****". (GZ 119–124)****.*

The participants' perspectives and storylines are aligned with the literature, which emphasises the importance of victim safety, autonomy, and wellbeing during offender reintegration. Participants like **AM, D, FM, and GZ,** who underlined the importance of victim inclusion in decision-making, respect for their readiness and emotional safety, echo literature emphasising the need for clear and timely information for victims so that they may make informed choices about their safety (Richards et al., 2020). Newer research (Richards, Death, Chataway, Emzin & Ronken et al., 2025) has found that victim-survivors place importance on two needs during offender release: information, as well as counselling or psychological support, which were also key themes for many participants **(BL, AR, FM)**.

The implicit marginalisation felt by participants, in particular those who felt that victims are vulnerable, traumatised, and 'neglected,' **FM** and **AR** are in keeping with the critiques that victim voices are generally not central within the criminal justice system. Shapland, Willmore and Duff (2012:47) have noted that, whereas the accused is accorded a number of procedural protections, victim participation is limited and to a largely symbolic. This is exacerbated by South African literature that highlights how it

fails to specifically recognise victims or provide direct protection for them, which can lead to the perception that victims' interests are not meaningfully prioritised, whereas the Constitution grants numerous rights to the accused under Section 35 (Murhula & Tolla, 2020:2; South Africa, 1996). Participants **D** and **GZ**, who both felt that reintegration should not be on "the offender's terms," reflects this concern.

Ubuntu, which calls for the preservation of dignity and equity for all concerned, likewise buttresses participants' advocacy for a more humane and victim-centred approach to reintegration **(AR, FM)**. Murhula and Tolla (2020:2) argue that it is not possible to meaningfully restore justice if victims' needs are not met, which is clearly echoed in the participants' emphasis on emotional care, the provision of counselling services, and protection from stigmatisation **(AR 159–181; FM 228–290)**. Stewart, Thompson, Beaudette, Buck, Laframboise et al. (2018) similarly argue that for harm to be truly addressed, victims, offenders and communities should all be part of the process, as was expressed by **AM** and **D** in their views about reintegration as a means to rebuild trust and create safety.

The participants' anxiety about the emotional costs of reintegration, as well as the potential for secondary or vicarious trauma, speaks to a larger societal fear around crime and safety. Singh (2016:1) has noted how a new "crime consciousness" has defined people's expectations, including calls for harsher measures, which may also explain the participants' demands for safety conditions, offender-victim distance, and trauma-informed approaches **(GZ, FM).** The literature is also clear that some victim-survivors do in fact support structured reintegration supports for offenders, but not out of empathy or sympathy, but because they recognise that such supports reduce the risk of reoffending and are thus more protective of the broader community (Richards et al., 2025) – a viewpoint that may also be subtly reflected in the accounts of **AM** and **AR** who recognised the need for a balanced approach that is not at the expense of victim safety.

The existing literature has shown that reintegration must be placed within a victim-centred framework that includes information sharing, emotional support, protection from harm and risk, and respect for victims' autonomy. The participants' accounts in this theme are in keeping with the existing literature on the topic, which shows that victim-

focused reintegration decisions are needed if justice, safety, and long-term community stability are to be meaningfully achieved.

This strong emphasis on victim-centred reintegration sets an important context for the following subtheme, where participants describe the wider role of community structures in supporting safe and effective reintegration practices.

4.3.3.2 Subtheme 2: Community support

Participants noted that reintegration is not solely the task of correctional services or formal institutions, but a shared community responsibility requiring action, empathy and practical support. They thought that communities significantly influence whether reintegration contributes to rehabilitation or perpetuates exclusion and stigma. The stories emphasised the need for emotional support, social inclusion, structured monitoring and community-led initiatives that promote safety, connection and a sense of belonging for both victims and offenders. Participants saw reintegration as follows as a collective effort that depends on supportive relationships, meaningful activities and community cohesion to reduce the risk of reoffending:

"The community members should make sure that they are supporting both the victim and the offenders, and they should make sure that there is a certain level of understanding and adjustment. There should be awareness talks about the rights of both the victim and the offenders. They should make sure that victims are protected and not triggered. Offenders should be monitored, and the community can also conduct school campaigns and other campaigns that can benefit the community at large". ***(AM 88-95).***

"Community members can play a vital role in supporting rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. They should educate themselves about sexual offences and the importance of rehabilitation and provide a supportive and non-judgmental environment for offenders who are actually seeking to change and who show that they want to change". ***(BL 78-82).***

"Support and accountability programmes can be an effective way to support the rehabilitation of sex offenders. These programmes typically involve a team of community volunteers who provide support, guidance, and accountability to the offender. They also prioritise community safety and victim support". ***(BL 153-158).***

"Support mental health treatment programmes". ***(DB 85).***
"To try and regain the trust, although it may not be there. So, it's true, these educational and collective efforts, programmes, and discussions can help in that area". ***(DB 92-95).***
"OK, I think there should be psychological and emotional support through counselling, therapy, and peer support groups. They can also ensure access to safe houses and encourage victim-centered justice, just to make sure that victims can have the confidence to live in the community again". ***(DB 100-104).***
"Supportive aspects: the community must offer emotional and practical support. Such assistance could also include some form of employment. As I said, this can help maintain peace and prevent offenders from dwelling on past offences". ***(DB 111-115).***

"Alright, first and foremost, society should keep open arms to such individuals. Once they have been freed from the law after undergoing their punishment or correction, they should feel welcomed, loved, and part of society again". ***(AR 106-110).***
"We should provide support in terms of psychological assistance and offer them some job opportunities to keep them occupied, so that they do not reoffend". ***(AR 125-126).***

"We need to give one another a chance because we are all still human beings. The role of the community is to ensure that the person is rehabilitated. Communities must have activities; a person must not come out and be lost. Communities should have opportunities for social interaction. There are few things happening in our communities now, which are visible, and if these are not happening, people may feel isolated. First of all, we need to have sports, social gatherings, or community activities to create a common ground with these individuals. Unfortunately, in our communities, we do not see that happening. If an offender wants to return and the community wants to engage that person, but there are no sports grounds, social activities, music, or talent shows, it becomes difficult to build relationships. Government and community leaders should find

*ways to organise social gatherings and events. This will enable both the offender and the community to build a relationship". **(FM 152-173).***

*"I think we, as a community, need to meet the government halfway by offering our own immediate support system. We should have counselling groups. Families should also participate and not only rely on government rehabilitation programs. We should have our own support systems and structures to reaffirm victims and offenders that there is still hope and that the community has not given up on them. We offer them another second chance, and for victims, it is to let them know that it is not the end of the road. Yes, something wrong was done to them, but it can be rectified within society. We should also make sure we have a strong and rigid police forum to prevent these crimes from repeating". **(FS 56-68).***

*"Boys, especially after playing soccer or participating in tournaments, can be brought together to share their stories. This motivates and empowers them so that they do not fall into the same trap**" (MN 83-185).** "Yes, the community needs to support the offender at all levels. Even though he goes for rehabilitation, the community knows that what he has done was not right, but they need to see him and give him a second chance. God gives us a second chance. The message should be to offer a second chance, and when the offender sees that the community is genuinely giving a second chance, it reinforces positive change". **(MN 208-241).***

Community support was a theme described as one of the foundations of reintegration based on empathy, social connectedness and practical support. The ways in which the participants described community support reflected their understanding of the role of reintegration as being premised on not only formal programmes, but also relationships with the informal networks and members of communities. Emotional and psychological support in the form of counselling, support groups and safe spaces were described as critical, not only for victims, but also for offenders. This suggests a belief that reintegration is not just about the management of behavioural risk factors, but also about the social and emotional aspects of the lives of these individuals.

They also mentioned support in the form of provision of employment, engaging activities and community events as a key form of practical support. Meaningful activity, employment and involvement in community events were described as being central to the prevention of idleness, social isolation and the development of pro-social identity and reintegration into 'normal life'. A recurring theme was that communities have a moral responsibility to 'take back' or 'welcome back' those who have 'done their time', while also holding them accountable and upholding community safety. This was not described as being soft on offenders but rather being a means to prevent crime and protect the community.

The participants also described an important role of community collaboration with government and formal structures, with this support not replacing formal structures but rather complementing it with more localised and tailored support. As such, their narratives illustrated a desire for a shift from communities being spectators to taking ownership of the reintegration process through education, communication, collective action and formalised social support.

Participants' focus on community support as a key element of reintegration closely aligns with the literature on the social, structural and psychological barriers that individuals face upon returning from incarceration. Reintegration is widely understood to be a complex process affected by many factors, one of the most salient of which is the social stigma associated with a criminal record. Stigmatisation has been demonstrated to undermine self-esteem and confidence and to dramatically curtail employment, housing and social opportunities, leading to increased vulnerability and hampering rehabilitation (McWilliams & Hunter, cited in Mohamad, Razak, Sarnon & Mohamed, 2024:1195). These factors mirror the issues raised by participants such as **DB, AR** and **FM**, who pointed to the need for emotional support, purposeful activities and a stable income to prevent marginalisation and reduce risk of negative behaviours.

Attitudes towards those who have committed sexual offences are influenced by cultural, social, social, legal and political factors and the literature shows that they can change over time in line with broader social currents (Harper, Hogue & Bartels, 2018:1003; Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017:115). Participants' emphasis on non-judgemental support, social

inclusion and open community dialogue aligns with this literature, which demonstrates that improving public knowledge of sexual offences is crucial for enabling more constructive community responses. For example, McCartan et al. as cited in Tuschick, et al. (2025b:2) argue that education and awareness raising are key to more informed, effective and compassionate responses to sexual offences and to improving support for victim-survivors. This is in line with the opinions of participants such as **AM**, **DB** and **MN** who identified the need for awareness talks, youth engagement and collective efforts to rebuild community trust.

The literature also supports participants' belief that reintegration is not just the responsibility of government but can be strengthened through interaction between formal systems and community structures. In providing emotional, psychological and practical support, for example through work opportunities, social activities or volunteer-led accountability measures, communities can help to reduce stigma and increase distance. Participants' identification of sports activities, community gatherings and strong local support structures **(FM, FS, MN)** is consistent with the body of research arguing that reintegrative environments facilitate pro-social identity and contribute to safer, more successful reintegration.

In conclusion, the participants in this study highlighted community support as an important element in creating a safe environment for reintegration. The narratives reflected their belief that reintegration is not only achieved through correctional or therapeutic programmes but is also facilitated by the day-to-day efforts of neighbours, families, volunteers and local structures who offer emotional, social and practical support. The participants acknowledged the negative impact of stigmatisation, isolation and lack of opportunity on the desistance process and emphasised the importance of inclusive environments, structured activities and collective responsibility. This theme suggests that communities play an active role in the reintegration process, rather than being passive observers, and sets the stage for the next subtheme, namely the role of education and awareness in shaping community attitudes and strengthening reintegration practices.

4.3.3.3 Subtheme 3: Education and awareness programmes

Participants suggested education and awareness programmes as ways to enhance community understanding of sexual offences and to improve the reintegration process. The perception was that myths, fear, and ignorance fuel resistance towards reintegration and community safety are eroded as a result. Participants highlighted that education is a means of prevention, cultivating respect, informed choices and a sense of responsibility. Participants responded as follows indicating that awareness programmes that are structured are considered to help communities to respond more positively to both victims and offenders, as well as minimise stigmatisation and misconceptions.

"I think for the community members, there must be more education and awareness campaigns so that they can integrate all these things as well. They can also promote restorative justice practices, such as facilitating open discussions". ***(DB 79-81).***

"Yeah, awareness is important. Speak about the way women should be treated and how to respect them, as everyone deserves to be respected". ***(MN 189-190).***
"OK, so there should be training, for example, on sexual harassment in all places, especially workplaces and schools. I'm really excited because this is what is happening in my workplace". ***(MN 241-243).***

"The community needs to protect its people immediately when these individuals are around; the community must develop awareness". ***(NG 185-186).***
"The only thing that the community can do is to seek measures and use certain calendar months to make children aware, for example, through school platforms, teaching children how to be safe in the community. You can organise forums and use different types of platforms". ***(NG 215-219).***

"Maybe what the community could do is to participate in the awareness campaigns that the government conducts. But we find that in many situations, the government doesn't come down to the people to explain some of these things, making it difficult for us to accept rehabilitation and reintegration". ***(NN 110-114).***

“The same effort should be put into coming to the community and running programmes that raise awareness about such issues—how we should act—because as a community, we do not even understand how a person got parole. Sometimes it is unclear or uncertain whether it should even happen. There should be programmes that are on radio, TV, and in person, where people can ask questions. These programmes should explain how the parole process works and also how the community must try to accept these individuals, because sometimes the lack of knowledge is what makes us reluctant to get involved”. ***(NN 138-145).***

“Meaning, once they have been freed from the law after undergoing their punishment or correction, they should be welcomed properly. Let them feel loved and part of society again. Don’t let them shy away from their company”. ***(AR 108-111).***

Participants viewed education and awareness as fundamental enablers for successful reintegration. They repeatedly referred to fear and misconceptions as the sources of many community rejections. Parolees’ alleged crimes and the prospect of their community reintegration were not well understood and so were the processes of parole and rehabilitation in South Africa. Education and awareness could therefore help to correct misinformation, increase empathy and encourage informed participation and support. Informed communities would be more willing and prepared to approach reintegration with caution but fairness, and to support it without compromising safety.

Many participants recommended early and continuous education, starting in schools, and continuing in workplaces and community forums. In particular, they emphasised the importance of teaching respect, consent and safety, alongside accurate information about offender management and supervision. Awareness-raising initiatives were also seen to explain roles and responsibilities of government, communities and support services, and so, they reduce confusion and distrust. Education was linked to empowerment, as informed communities would be less likely to stigmatise and more likely to be involved in prevention and other constructive practices.

Education and awareness were thus perceived as powerful reintegration tools, which are able to transform attitudes, strengthen community cohesion and ensure more

informed, inclusive and safer responses to sexual offences. This subtheme also highlights participants' understanding of sustainable reintegration as depending not only on individual transformation, but also on social learning.

Research findings that focus on education and awareness programmes are reinforced by related scholarship. There is an extensive evidence base suggesting that the public's understanding of sexual offending, rehabilitation and reintegration is an important key factor that shapes attitudes towards these topics (Tuschick et al., 2025a). Literature on sexual violence prevention suggests that the public tends to have some misconceptions about this issue and fears that exaggerate the actual risks posed by offenders (Sakib, 2022:16). The assumption that sexual violence is most likely to be committed by a stranger, for example, has been cited as a factor that sustains a degree of fear and resistance within communities. So, achieving progress towards public safety and fairer treatment for sexual offenders is more likely when the community is made aware that victimisation is more likely to happen within existing relationships than through unknown offenders (Reed, 2017:20). This would appear to align with participants' opinions regarding awareness programmes, which they associated with the need to correct misinformation.

Participants' views also concur with the literature on the importance of education with regard to sexual offending, rehabilitation and reintegration, specifically as it applies to families and communities. Tuschick et al. (2024) assert that public education is a long-term project and must be accompanied by consistent evaluation of legal and policy frameworks if it is to promote informed and productive community participation. Participants such as **DB, MN** and **NN**, who specifically mentioned training for schools, workplaces and community forums, appear to reflect on the position in the literature that such awareness initiatives can improve community preparedness and understanding.

The need for education with regard to stigmatisation was also reinforced by literature. Stigmatisation has been found to be a major source of rejection and ostracism in the community for offenders, and it can promote social anxiety and avoidance that hinder reintegration (Sakib, 2022:2). The drivers of this stigma often include exaggerated or misplaced fears about recidivism and public safety (Delporte, 2017). Such research

tends to support the participants' concerns about the rejection that results from a lack of knowledge about rehabilitation and reintegration. Related criminology research also suggests that the public generally leans towards more punishing approaches towards offenders, particularly in the case of serious or sexual offences. Support is strongest when the offender in question is perceived as irredeemable or unresponsive to rehabilitative efforts (Clubb, Altier, Kobayashi, Davies, & Brownsord, 2024:11).

On the other hand, research has also indicated that public attitudes are not entirely fixed and that they can be influenced in a positive direction. For instance, studies have found that community members are more likely to hold positive views of offenders who have undergone some form of rehabilitation programme, and that programme completion is associated with less avoidance and greater willingness to socialise (Clubb et al., 2024:11). Brubacher (2019) also found that public perceptions of an offender's redeemability have an important influence on community acceptance. These results appear to be in line with participants' assertion that awareness programmes can play a role in facilitating a more constructive approach by communicating information about rehabilitation, parole and reintegration.

Treatment and rehabilitation programmes have also been recognised as a key part of efforts to reduce recidivism and increase community safety (Dalwadi & Sharma, 2025:34). Raising community's awareness of the current programmes and their effectiveness may improve community confidence in reintegration efforts. The literature seems to thus support participants' views about education and awareness programmes. By increasing knowledge of reintegration and related processes, it may be possible to shift community responses in a way that better supports safety, de-stigmatisation and long-term desistance.

To summarise, participants believed education and awareness programmes are important to combat fear, misinformation, and stigmatisation in the reintegration of sexual offenders. Their responses reveal a belief that an informed community is more likely to hold a balanced view of both caution and fairness. Participants emphasised that educational programmes could empower communities to contribute constructively to the reintegration process. Participants believed that education increases public

understanding of sexual offending, rehabilitation and parole, leading to greater empathy and reduced resistance. This emphasis on awareness and knowledge-building provides a crucial foundation for the next subtheme, which examines participant responses on perpetrator accountability during reintegration.

4.3.3.4 Subtheme 4: Accountability of perpetrator

Accountability of the perpetrator was emphasised by participants as a key condition for reintegration to be seen as acceptable to the community. The concept of accountability was not associated with punishment but was rather seen as a process through which the perpetrators of a crime took responsibility for their actions, showed a commitment to change, and actively engaged with rehabilitative and monitoring programmes. For participants, accountability was seen as a reassurance process through which the community and victims felt safer, and through which an offender could work towards behaviour change and reintegration. Participants expressed themselves as follows I this regard:

"I think the offenders must be held accountable for their actions by regularly meeting with group volunteers, and then yes, for even the supportive aspect". ***(DB 109-111).***

"I just guess educating them, like giving them the cosmos of most times… What I've come to realise is that it's psychological. You're not emotionally and mentally right as well. So, if they can perhaps see a psychiatrist, because most of the time they have their own issues that might have started during childhood". ***(D 77-78).***
"So, I do think the accountability programmes would really help. Yeah, because if they can go through it, they can basically become better people faster. You know, it takes a community to raise a child, so yeah". ***(D 132-135).***

"Again, the offenders should be given psychological attention. Most of the time, it has to do with emotional intelligence and stress issues. People are depressed, and they do these things to relieve themselves and to address relationship issues. Offenders should really be taken through a series of therapies, including clinical psychology". ***(AR 198-204).***

"So, you cannot just have one programme to assist a particular person; however, I would say what is important is to interview these people and find out what their needs are. Once interviewed, an analysis should be done so that you can classify a programme and address a particular need. You don't have to have a generic programme if I may say. And to ensure accountability, let's find a person…" "Support and accountability programmes: accountability comes voluntarily. If you want to be accountable for something, we can support you. How do we sustain that accountability? People have to first acknowledge what they have done was wrong and understand the causes that led them to do such things. I think addressing the root causes of a programme will help them function, and if it's sustained, they will find ownership and accountability". ***(FM 263-290).***

"Well, they should be very rigid. They should be very strong. We must have laws that strongly reprimand sex offenders. I would strongly suggest that our justice system be strengthened so that even people who are thinking of committing such acts, when they consider the sentence attached to the crime, don't think twice. We must not be lenient in how we address these crimes because, at the end of the day, they destabilise our societies. We should have very strong, forceful laws". ***(FS 111-119).***

"That means the person will have to take account and must be held accountable for their actions. As much as you have served your time for what you did, you must acknowledge that you did what you were accused of. That first step—the first step to healing—is accepting that you are wrong. This plays a very important and key role in ensuring the person turns a better leaf and that community members feel comfortable around them". ***(KA 147-153).***

The participants saw accountability as one of the most important components to consider a person's reintegration back into the community. Taking responsibility, psychological intervention, structured programming and consequence were thought to align with the broader accountability **(AD 109–111)**. The perspectives held by the participants were that accountability was a complex process and not a one-time act **(DB 109–111)**. Accountability should be clearly established through the constant visible demonstration of such things as the willingness to attend programmes, regularly

scheduled meetings and be closely monitored by a system of volunteers. The participants repeatedly suggested that psychological and emotional attributes that seem to be contributing factors to sexual offending are emotional and mental issues that one might be going through. Several participants noted that psychiatry and medication play a significant role in the reintegration of the individual back to the community **(AR 198–204; D 77–78)**. In this regard, offenders have to be held accountable for their actions but must be psychologically treated as well.

Participants further stressed that accountability programmes should be structured, and responsive to individual needs. The overall idea presented by the participants was that programmes need to be available and based or tailored on a particular individual's risk factors **(FM 263–290).** Accountability was therefore linked to a sense of taking ownership and developing an understanding of the harm they have done **(FM 263–290)**. Hence, it is suggested that as part of the accountability process, the offender needs to be able to admit or at least be seen to show remorse.

At the same time, participants explained that accountability must be reinforced through firm legal guidelines, and that strong and uncompromising laws are needed to prevent offenders from future offending and at the same time to signal the seriousness of sexual crimes. Legal rigidity is seen as complementary to rehabilitative efforts, and not as contradictory. This will serve to protect society and reassure communities that such offences are taken seriously **(FS 111–119).**

Participants explained accountability as a balance between providing structure and support, and they combined psychological intervention, personalised programming, community involvement and legal consequences. Observable or visible accountability is essential for community acceptance. Offenders must admit their wrongdoing. This is a highly valuable step needed for behavioural change and social reintegration **(KA 147–153)**. This subtheme shows that reintegration is only possible when offenders actively show responsibility for their actions, a desire to change, as well as respect for those who were harmed.

The participants stressed the need for accountability as a prerequisite for reintegration, and this is strongly supported by current correctional literature. In sexual offending cases, accountability is often seen as some form of externally imposed restriction or confinement, such as imprisonment, residency restrictions, structured supervision and/or prescribed access to employment and other areas of life. When compared to research evidence, it (accountability) forms part of broader risk-management strategies that create saver environments for both victims and communities (De Vries Robbé, Mann, Maruna & Thornton, 2015). Protective factors according to De Vries Robbé et al. (2015) include social, interpersonal, psychological and environmental factors in addition to behavioural compliance, which is in line with participants' views on accountability.

This also matches with participants' views on the need for structured, consistent programming. This is very closely aligned in the international evidence on CoSA. Internationally, the CoSA model has been found to contribute to responsibility-taking, desistance and reintegration through sustained contact with trained community volunteers and professionals (McAlinden, 2016; Wager et al., 2024). During weekly meetings and regular communication, volunteers and professionals can support an offender in developing life skills, accessing housing and employment, and addressing unmet emotional needs through therapeutic and rehabilitative services, such as addiction treatment and anger management (Höing et al., cited in Grossi, 2017).

The literature also supports participants' views on the centrality of psychological intervention to accountability. In most cases, sexual offending is associated with significant psychological and/or developmental vulnerabilities, including exposure to or perpetration of physical and/or sexual abuse and neglect, histories of trauma, impulsive, poor emotional regulation, depression, anxiety, substance use, low education and poverty, offence-supportive attitudes and sexual deviancy (Barros et al., 2022). This profile often hampers an offender's ability to take responsibility and accept faults and may increase the risk of recidivism. Both therapeutic and non-therapeutic programmes are therefore required to address recidivistic behaviour, and evidence on responsivity suggests that such programmes are more likely to be effective where they are tailored to the offender's individual risk factors.

One of the most commonly used international frameworks for this purpose is model, which can be used to identify an offender's risk score, criminogenic needs and responsivity to treatment, as well as to advocate for higher levels of intervention for offenders with a high risk of recidivism (Barros et al., 2022). Research has found that RNR-aligned programmes, especially those using CBT, can be effective in promoting accountability and improved outcomes by developing insight, emotional regulation and victim awareness and by increasing acceptance of responsibility and self-blame (Barros et al., 2022). This is closely in line with participants' arguments that offenders must recognise wrongdoing, take responsibility and actively participate in treatment.

In South Africa, a gap has been found to exist between the systematic management of recidivism and available literature on and tools for recidivism management. According to employees of the DCS, there are no defined policies, procedures or frameworks to deal with recidivism despite the DCS White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2005) requiring the department to intervene and take responsibility where recidivism does occur (Samuels, Roman & Schoeman, 2024:197). The lack of systematic recidivism management detracts from accountability efforts and increases the burden on communities and informal support systems. Scholars have therefore called for recidivism to be treated as a national priority, for the DCS to improve support and collaboration with communities, and for interventions with ex-offenders to be more holistic and interdepartmental (Samuels et al., 2024; DCS, 2005).

The participants in this research considered accountability as a prerequisite for reintegration of sexual offenders. Accounts of participants clearly demonstrated that they expected accountability to go beyond retributive response and include long-term taking of responsibility, mental health treatment, supervised and pro-social participation in intervention programmes. Demonstrated accountability by means of acceptance of responsibility, engagement in individualised interventions, and compliance with legal and social programmes, as perceived by participants, made reintegration more tolerable and, in their view, safer. This perception offers an opportunity to coordinate an evidence-informed approach to accountability and presents a rationale for the last subtheme: conditions for nonacceptance or outright rejection of reintegration by communities.

4.3.3.5 Subtheme 5: Not allowing perpetrators back into the community

This subtheme reflects the opinions of community members who believe that reintegration is not always safe or acceptable. Participants' considerable hostility to the return of those who had committed sexual offences stemmed from their feelings of fear, uncertainty, and unmanageable danger. Reintegration is experienced as a threat to community safety. It is not a process that could be controlled by accountability or support, and sexual offences hold an ongoing threat that society is ill-prepared to address, as seen in the following storylines:

"I don't think there's much role that they can play in rehabilitating these people or reintegrating these people because they're basically playing with fire. It's just like bringing a snake in your house, hoping that the poison is no longer there because someone has removed the poison. Then you take the snake and keep it in your house". It is just like that, rather". ***(NG 178-183).***

"Reintegrating them into society is a disaster. There is no role that we can play, except for the sexual offender themselves—or, let's say, a trained sexual offender professional—to assist them. You do not know what triggers them or what makes them commit that violent sexual act to people. There's nothing else that you can assist with". ***(SN 84-89).***

"It's not something that I—or maybe I don't understand what I'm doing—but I don't think there's anything that we can do, and it cannot be taken lightly". ***(SN 112-113).***

This subtheme is the most 'rigid' or exclusionary subtheme that was represented by a small number of participants who felt that offenders were too unpredictable and too risky to be reintegrated into the community. This subtheme was characterised by clear language of fear, anger and distrust of offenders as well as metaphors of danger and harm towards victims and the community. Participants felt that reintegration was "playing with fire" or "bringing a ticking bomb" to community. This view suggests that participants see the risk of reoffending as both uncontrollable and catastrophic **(NG**

178–183). This belief implies that the rehabilitation process is unable to fully ensure community safety, even with treatment and supervision.

A strong focus on unpredictability was a characteristic of this subtheme. The inability to pinpoint the causes or anticipate what will set an offender off led participants to feel that the community is unable to control the process of reintegration safely **(SN 84–89).** These participants did not see that communities have an effective or useful role in the rehabilitation process. The prevention of reintegration was seen as the only way to ensure the safety of the community. This subtheme could be placed at the extreme end of risk aversion.

The subtheme also included a sense of uncertainty and lack of knowledge around the reintegration process. This did not, however, make participants any more open to the possibility, but rather, more resistant **(SN 112–113)**. There are some suggestions that fear and lack of information leads to an inability to be accepted.

This subtheme was the least open and most rigid on the continuum. As with the previous subthemes on this continuum, the position was likely represented by a minority of the sample, and even within this subtheme there was some evidence of 'middle ground'. The difference between this subtheme and the previous one on the continuum is that participants supporting this subtheme do not see victim safety as a possibility, or perhaps even a priority, even if there were support and accountability in place. This subtheme reflects a completely opposite viewpoint to the previous theme on this continuum which placed victim safety as a priority condition for reintegration.

A body of literature strongly substantiates the participants' views in this subtheme, as many studies consistently show public fear, distrust and stigmatisation to be common factors that hinder the reintegration of ex-offenders (Chikadzi, 2017; Lötter, 2024; Lekalakala, & Rakubu, 2025). On the question of trust and fear of reoffending, a number of studies concur that the community is more likely to have very little faith in the repentance of an offender, especially in cases of heinous crimes such as sexual offences (Ike et al., 2023:3). In this study, it was discovered that over 50% of survey participants anticipated ex-offenders to return to crime upon the opportunity to do so,

once again exemplifying the prevalence of a strong culture of mistrust within reintegration (Ike et al., 2023:2). In this respect, the viewpoint of the participants is mostly aligned with the literature in that many communities' view reintegration as a dangerous and unpredictable social experiment (Chikadzi, 2017; Chikadzi et. al., 2022).

This study not only explains this community reluctance but also delves into psychological and trauma-related underpinnings. In their study, Ike et al. (2023:3) posit that community opinion and subsequent rejection of reintegration is often deeply entrenched in social identity processes, where symbolic boundaries between the 'law-abiding' community and ex-offenders influence people to adopt a more oppositional 'us versus them' orientation. In this identity narrative, offenders become a negative outgroup that is prone to devaluation, exclusion and stigmatisation (Ike et al., 2023:3). In this way, the psychological process of social categorisation helps account for and explain the type of stigma and devaluation participants associate with reintegration. Such notions are evident in participants' metaphors of danger and contamination towards reintegration, which suggest an 'us versus them' social identity dynamic in which offenders are seen as a permanent societal threat rather than a population with the potential to change.

It was established that the trauma often experienced by community members is another significant aspect that influences their negative views towards reintegration. The study found that the effects of sexual offending often span beyond the individual victims to impact on the entire community, where trauma often leads to fear, vigilance and resistance to the reintegration of offenders (Ike et al., 2023:3). In this way, trauma not only within the direct victim, but also within the community at large leads to greater perceptions of risk and bolsters a general rejection of offenders even in the absence of a direct threat to community members. In a previous publication on this research topic, it was also shown that while reintegration often prioritises the offender, the emotional and psychological needs of impacted communities are often sidelined and ignored (Felbab-Brown, 2018).

The literature also documents public stigma and fear as common and recurring factors that impede reintegration across different settings. In a study that examined the issue of reintegration with a particular focus on Central American criminal groups, the researchers noted that in many cases reintegration was actively obstructed by negative public attitudes and perceptions characterised by fear and rejection, especially in cases where the type of offending was likely to incite greater public outrage and moral condemnation (Arreola et al., 2024). This further corroborates previous research findings, where stigma towards ex-offenders and lack of trust in the genuine reform of offenders were similarly reported as some of the greatest factors hindering the reintegration of former offenders into society (Felbab-Brown, 2018; Owonikoko, 2022). In the South African context, it was found that the level of stigmatisation against ex-offenders was considerably high, with a strong culture of shaming and rejection compounding high and unsustainable levels of recidivism (Lotter, 2022).

Literature also draws attention to a range of structural and relational factors that can undermine reintegration in various ways. Zondi (2012:763) found in a study on post-release reintegration in South Africa that there was usually very little communication between the host community and the DCS, and that this was a common barrier that undermined reintegration. In contrast, where there was common knowledge and shared access to information between the DCS and the community as well as community participation in reintegration activities, the success of reintegration was said to improve (Zondi, 2012:766). In a similar study in South Africa, it was also reported that stigmatisation, family rejection, lack of employment opportunities, mental health issues and absence of adequate aftercare collectively diminished the effectiveness of reintegration and heightened the chances of reoffending (Chikadzi, 2017). In a related way, the literature also accentuates the discomfort that is common in many societies when offenders are reintegrated into these communities, as the stigma against offenders not only directly impacts the individuals in question but also indirectly affects social cohesion at large (Thurber, cited in Chikadzi, 2017).

The final important point from the literature shows that while the fear of sexual offending is common, it is often at odds with reality, as the fear of these crimes is typically disproportionate to the risk of offenders present (Reed, 2017:20). This again highlights

how participants' rejectionist and alarmist views of reintegration are informed by deeper psychological issues and trauma. In this way, the available literature (Chikadzi et al., 2022) supports the subtheme under analysis, as it provides both evidence that is directly similar to participants' views and also offers insights into a variety of social, trauma and stigma-related processes that help shape public resistance to reintegration.

In conclusion, this subtheme presented a categorical rejection of reintegration based on fear, mistrust, and a belief in ongoing danger. The opposing stance against reintegration depicted sexual offenders as unpredictable, inherently dangerous, and beyond the reach of change. This group of participants expressed a belief that rehabilitation and community-based interventions were unlikely to lower the risk of harm. These beliefs aligned with community trauma, stigma, and social distancing, perceiving exclusion as the only way to ensure safety. This subtheme represented the most restrictive community response in Theme 3, highlighting the substantial impact of fear and negative social identity on reintegration efforts.

Bronfenbrenner's EST offers a useful theoretical lens for understanding these complex dynamics and patterns surrounding reintegration. The theory emphasises how human behaviour and social reactions are the outcomes of mutual interactions between individuals and various levels of their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The aforementioned personal responses at the microsystem and mesosystem levels, such as community members' fear, trauma and shared meanings around sexual offending, impact directly on interpersonal reactions and collective decisions on how to respond to returning offenders in a given community. The emergence of negative social identities and exclusionary attitudes is also seen to be formed through daily interactions and relationships at the level of families, neighbourhoods and community networks.

At the macrosystem level, cultural norms, moral values around crime and punishment and stigma against sexual offenders are found to shape and legitimise rejectionist responses, while 'us versus them' distinctions and the normalisation of exclusion as a means of protection are reinforced by the broader value system. The chronosystem further contextualises these responses, as past experiences of crime and unresolved

trauma within a community accumulate over time, further intensifying resistance to reintegration. Bronfenbrenner's EST framework thus highlights that reintegration outcomes are not only the result of individual transformation but are deeply influenced by the multilayered environmental factors that can either facilitate or obstruct the reintegration process.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Role of social workers in the reintegration process

This theme describes community members perceived roles of social workers in the reintegration process of people who have offended them sexually (see Table 4.5). In reflecting on the work of social workers in the reintegration process, participants viewed them as important actors in this field, positioned between the offender and victim as well as the community in terms of safety. The way participants positioned social workers included reference to the need for professional direction, psychosocial support and coordination of care, and to attend to the victim's rights and community's needs.

Community members perceived social workers as people who should facilitate the reintegration process as it involves affective, interpersonal and structural issues. Their role, as described by community members, includes community intervention, public education, mediation and collaboration with other professionals, especially correctional services. In positioning the role of social workers as facilitating this process, they considered them to have a responsibility and skills to position themselves across the domains of accountability, support and safety. This, it was noted, should be done in an ethical and trauma informed manner and should also be sensitive to the needs of both the people re-entering the community and the community. The subthemes listed in Table 4.6, give a description of the position and role of social workers as articulated by participants.

Table 4-6 Theme 4: Role of social workers in the reintegration process

THEMES	SUBTHEMES	CATEGORIES
Theme 4: Role of social workers in the reintegration process	Subtheme 1: The victim	
	Subtheme 2: The family	
	Subtheme 3: The community	•Equip community members to address social issues. •Evaluate impact on community and keep them informed. •Community dialogue •Awareness and education
	Subtheme 4: The perpetrator	•Monitoring and accountability of the perpetrator •Psychosocial and rehabilitative support
	Subtheme 5: Systematic and integrative roles of social workers in the reintegration process	•Research and data-informed practice. •Advocate for policy development and the protection of human rights •Co-ordinated counselling and restorative facilitation •The facilitation of restorative encounters between victims and perpetrators

4.3.4.1 Subtheme 1: The victim

In almost every part of the reintegration process, participants placed social workers at the forefront in protecting victims. Community members articulated the safety, psychosocial wellbeing and empowerment of victims as the essential prerequisite for reintegration to be acceptable. Social workers were seen as professionals with the capacity to determine victim's safety, offer psychosocial support and ensure victims'

rights are upheld, while the reintegration process is not allowed to re-traumatise or terrorise victims. This subtheme therefore underlines the community's expectation that social workers should ensure victim-centred, trauma informed interventions throughout reintegration. Participants had the following to say about it:

"I think also the social workers can provide support and guidance to victims and their families throughout the reintegration process". ***(BL 170-171)****.*

"In the healing process of the victims and in making sure that we defeat certain. stigmas". ***(FS 130).***

"In terms of a social worker, I think the first step will be to see to it that the victim is okay. The rest of us have reason to feel that everything is okay, because if the victim is not fine, we don't see any reason for the perpetrator to still be around. If the victim feels unsafe, then there's no need for the perpetrator to be around". ***(KA 161-164).*** *"Yes, they play a role. I think if anyone plays the major role in making sure that these people feel safe being around the perpetrators, it will require the social workers' intervention".* ***(KA 176-178).***

"Social workers make visits to certain NGOs or other places where victims are being kept together, because remember, fear is still present for victims. They might need to go to a place of safety". ***(MN 372-375).***

"For the victims of this type of crime, social workers should advocate around this issue and spread more awareness". ***(NG 334-335).***

"More empowerment for victims is essential. They must be resourceful enough so that whatever the victims are experiencing, even after the offender is back, social workers should be active in securing and making sure that their rights are respected and that there is a way to send victims for support". ***(NG 336-340).***

"So, I feel like the social worker should make you feel that. We understand your fear and your pain". ***(SN 295-296)****.*

In these storylines, participants indicated that the role of social workers should be victim-centred, focussed on safety and emotional wellbeing. This is positioned as a non-negotiable priority within the reintegration process. Participants repeatedly emphasised victims' ongoing fear and vulnerability and asserted that reintegration of ex-offenders cannot proceed if victims feel unsafe or unheard. Social workers are identified as key protectors. They evaluate offenders' readiness for reintegration by assessing and looking at the victim's safety rather than offender timelines.

Victims need to receive counselling and guidance after the trauma that they have experienced. Victims need to be protected by social workers, in order to reduce the stigma that is being shown towards them. They need to receive psychosocial support, and psycho-social care, which can be achieved by counselling and guidance by the social workers to avoid re-traumatisation. Participants also emphasised that social workers should provide psychosocial support and secure space for the victims in order to protect them from stigma.

These storylines also linked the community's acceptance of reintegration of offenders directly to the wellbeing of victims, indicating that, when victims are perceived as supported and protected, the reintegration is viewed as more legitimate. However, if victims feel distressed or afraid, it is regarded as justification for halting or delaying reintegration. The subtheme shows that community members view social workers as ethical gatekeepers, and that their professional judgement and skills are essential to balancing reintegration with victim protection.

The participants' framing of social workers as having a protective role in relation to victims during reintegration is also consistent with the existing conceptualisations and definitions of victimhood and victim needs in sexual violence. Coetzee and Bezuidenhout (2017) define victims of sexual offences as individuals who have been harmed as a result of non-consensual or illegal sexual behaviour, and state that victimisation often involves physical and psychological harm (Coetzee, 2015:5; Coetzee & Bezuidenhout, 2016:11). These definitions support the participants' claims that social

workers should focus on victims' safety and wellbeing during reintegration, particularly where victims feel afraid, vulnerable and at risk **(KA 161–164; MN 372–375).**
The existing literature also supports the participants' need for victims to be heard and understood. Because sexual violence is generally considered to be highly traumatic and stigmatising, Wemmers, Parent and Lachance (2023) argue that victims' suffering should be communicated and understood. This is in line with the participants' expectations that social workers should facilitate listening to and acknowledging the victims **(SN 295–296; NG 336–340)**. This is also a crucial component of procedural justice for victims (Wemmers, et al., 2023). The life course impacts of sexual assault also support this need as Richards, et al. (2020) state that sexual victimisation can have negative impacts on health and wellbeing over time, supporting the community members' perspective that reintegration must be an ongoing consideration rather than a one-time administrative process **(BL 170–171; FS 130)**.

In terms of specific support needs, the literature also corroborates the participants' views on practical and coordinated support. Budd (2024:8) argues that victim services should be comprehensive and coordinated, and that victims should be provided with financial reimbursement for any medical costs and access to therapy services free of charge, along with legal advocacy if needed. The same source also notes that administrative obstacles should be reduced or removed so as not to prevent victims from receiving support. This corresponds with the expectation that social workers will provide long-term guidance and facilitate access to support systems during reintegration **(BL 170–171; NG 336–340)**. The literature on trauma-informed practice also provides a clear ethical and practice foundation for these roles. Levenson (2017) summarises the key trauma-informed principles of safety, trust, collaboration, choice and empowerment, supporting the participants' belief that social workers should be sensitive and ethical in their response to victims' fear and pain and aim to strengthen their autonomy and protection **(KA 176–178; SN 295–296)**. Finally, Richards et al. (2020) state that therapeutic interventions for victims are often necessary and may be intensive and long-term, reinforcing the need for ongoing and professional psychosocial support.

The existing literature is thus consistent with the participants' expectation that social workers should act as victim-centred practitioners and take care to safeguard victims'

safety, voice and empowerment, and coordinate support for them over the long term as part of the reintegration process. This victim-centred positioning then provides a clear springboard for the next subtheme, which shifts the spotlight to the importance of social workers supporting and counselling the families of sexual offenders and reintegration.

4.3.4.2 Subtheme 2: The family of the victim

Findings within this subtheme centre around community members' understandings of the role of social workers in supporting families impacted by sexual offending and the reintegration process. Participants acknowledged families as indirect victims and important support systems that experience emotional distress, confusion, and secondary trauma in the aftermath of sexual offenses. Social workers were seen as crucial in providing guidance, support, and counselling to families of ex-offenders, with a focus on ensuring that they are informed, emotionally supported, and equipped to play a positive role in the healing and reintegration process. Narratives reflected an expectation that social workers should help strengthen family functioning, facilitate communication, and offer psychosocial support in a manner that safeguards victims while promoting stability within the broader family system**.** Participants illustrated their views with the following storylines:

"So, the community, families, and the victim need to be informed, and I think that's very crucial". ***(D 153-154).***

"But when they provide mental support, counselling, and all that, it would also help the members of the community". ***(DB 126-127).***

"The family should always try to help the victims process what happened to them". ***(AR 169).***

"Provide access to counselling and therapy for victims, family members, and community members". ***(BL 124–125).***
"Foster a culture of empathy and understanding, while also prioritizing community and family safety and victim support". ***(BL 131-132).***

“I think social workers can also provide support and guidance to victims and their families throughout the reintegration process”. ***(BL 171-172).***
“Group counselling and family counselling should be conducted in this regard”. ***(AM 156).***

“The role of the social worker is to provide counselling not only to the family, but also to community members, because people might live in fear that it could happen again”. ***(SIHLE 242–245).***

“Social workers must provide counselling to the victims, their families, and the community”. ***(GZ 150).***

Families were consistently framed by participants as needing ongoing, intentional support during the reintegration process. A common view across the narratives was that families are emotionally affected by sexual offending; they may experience fear, distress and uncertainty alongside the victim. Consequently, participants felt that families should be informed, included and supported **(D 153–154).**

Intertwined with the preceding point was a prominent emphasis on social workers offering counselling and emotional guidance to families. Social workers were seen as counselling families in order to process trauma, regain emotional balance and support victims more effectively **(BL 124–125; AM 156)**. Additionally, family counselling was framed as a way of “building empathy” and preventing family members from closing off in fear within their household and community **(BL 131–132; SIHLE 242–245)**.

Supporting families to move past the experience of sexual offending was a third point made by participants. Participants emphasised that social workers need to help families reframe the experience and, in a sense, move on emotionally. This is to be done without ignoring or denying the harm caused to the victim, but rather in the interest of longer-term healing and stability **(AR 169)**. In this regard, social workers were thought to be able to help families by walking them through the reintegration process, managing fear of reoffending and responding in a proactive, helpful way to safety concerns that may arise.

In summary, the narratives locate social workers as key to the fortification of families during reintegration. Social workers are able to provide counselling, emotional guidance and information in a way that enables families to help victims, deal with emotional turmoil and create safer and more supportive living environments. The focus of this subtheme is that reintegration is not an individualised process; it must attend to the needs of the emotional wellbeing of family members who are affected directly and indirectly by sexual offending.

Even though participants' stories most often centred around the needs and experiences of victims' families, other studies noted that reintegration also impacts offenders' families. According to some of the literature, families of offenders could experience feelings of emotional strain, stigma, and social exclusion (Evans, Trahan & Laird, 2021; Tuschick et al., 2025:9). These aspects present important contextualisation of family reintegration, even though they were not as clearly stated in participants' accounts.

In the context of victims and victims' families, other literature recognised counselling as a core component of the recovery from sexual violence. Hope (2023) noted that counselling helps not only the individual survivor but enables the family structure as a whole to cope with the healing process. This resonates with participants' experiences, as they stated that social workers should provide family and group counselling in order to address their fear, emotional distress and on-going anxiety about reintegration of victim and their families. This is important as families of victims are the first place that an individual turns to when he or she experiences grief, fear, worry, or confusion (Kapur, 2022). Coping with trauma often begins with the family unit, however, without the social worker's guidance and interventions, families are not likely to be able to adequately manage those emotions.

Literature on the subject also states that reintegration is a complex process which requires extensive social work involvement with both the families of victims and families of offenders (Tuschick et al., 2025b). In the case of a victim-survivor's family, reintegration of an offender can bring back their trauma, anxiety and fear about the whole situation as their reoffend risk, release conditions and safety are still to be

addressed (Tuschick et al., 2025b). In this context, social work interventions based on a trauma-informed approach are critical to support the victim-survivor's family with their emotional regulation, restoring the sense of safety and avoidance of re-traumatisation during the reintegration process (Tuschick et al., 2025b).

Even though participants did not explicitly address this, other studies noted that the offender's family could also experience some considerable difficulties with reintegration. These difficulties for the families of offenders could be connected to loyalty, responsibility, and emotional issues as well as courtesy stigmatisation (Evans et al., 2021). Sources of stigma towards families could include informal and formal social groups, media, and the criminal justice system (Evans et al., 2021). The experience of stigmatisation can parallel that of the offender's experience of social exclusion from society (Evans et al., 2021). Literature also showed that having strong family ties, normative social networks and other social connections were protective factors in reintegration processes as it could offer more emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging (Cardoso et al., 2025). However, family reunification itself can also be difficult due to different factors such as trauma that has not been addressed, high or unrealistic expectations, and disrupted relationships.

Moreover, some of the literature showed that certain families did not possess enough social, emotional, or financial resources that would be required to support reintegration. In some cases, families can already be dealing with mental health and substance use disorders, poverty, or a lack of social capital, even before incarceration, during, and after an individual's release (Smith & Young, 2017). This weakens the family unit and can cause them to be unable to support an individual during reintegration. In this case, it becomes hard for families to provide a positive and stable environment for an individual upon release. It is important to note that reintegration challenges can exist on individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels which again proves the need for family-focused social work interventions.

In conclusion, the literature showed that some of the participants' expectations about the roles of social workers were substantiated. Participants expressed the idea that social workers should be able to strengthen the family ties, provide counselling, help

with fear and stigma, as well as supporting families with their emotions and other issues with regard to reintegration. In general, even though participants focused more on the family of victims, it is important to take a systemic view at family reintegration to help with healing, increase stability and achieve safer outcomes.

4.3.4.3 Subtheme 3: The community

This subtheme describes how community members view the social workers' role in the engagement, strengthening and support of communities during reintegration of sexual offenders. Community members perceived community as a risk and prevention setting. Social workers are seen as the people who will capacitate community members with the necessary skills, confidence and information to deal with social problems, safety and respond to reintegration. The subtheme also highlights the expectation that social workers need to actively engage community members in prevention, dialogue and awareness campaigns to reduce fear, stigma and misconceptions.

- **Category 1: Equipping community members to address social issues**

In this theme, the participants felt that the role of social workers should also focus on enabling communities to respond to the social issues of sexual offending and reintegration. Social workers were perceived as agents who would create the knowledge, skills, and confidence that would allow communities to protect themselves, support vulnerable people, and communicate with social systems. Under this category, it was expected that social workers would promote community agency and access to services as well as be able to focus on safety as an everyday practice as opposed to a reaction. The storylines run as follows:

“They can also help community members gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to navigate social systems”. ***(DB 121-122).***

“Especially the community—having ways to keep the community safe and to help, like maybe allowing kids to speak openly about sexual offenders who are in their community,

*so that they know who is there and can expose them, ensuring no one else gets hurt". **(GZ 156-159).***

*"I believe there is a shortage of social workers in our community. If they could be more involved—because the government gives us only a small number of social workers, and then they work in centers where we can go, even if it's not a 24-hour service, but a 24-hour service could assist—because, as we know, the statistics are very high for people who get sexually violated from time to time". **(NN 200-204).***

*"Or maybe, yeah, they can even teach their kids, because before the police can protect you, you need to protect yourself first. So maybe they also need that type of information about how to protect themselves. If you feel in danger, what should you do? If something like this happens to you, how can you talk about it or report it? At the end, they need to tell someone. Some people experience it and then keep quiet—they never talk about it because they are scared". **(SIHLE 249-257).***

The social work role with a focus on community empowerment was noted by most of the participants. According to them, social workers can provide skills to the community members and can help them to understand social systems to deal with risk and respond to it on time **(DB 121–122)**. This perspective differs from the idea of the community being passive, victimised, and at the receiving end. By understanding that they have the power to intervene, the community can contribute to prevention or protection.

Child safety and early disclosure were the concepts the participants talked about the most. Many of them underlined the importance of social workers enabling the children to speak out when they are in a position of danger or experiencing sexual offending and understanding personal safety **(GZ 156–159; SIHLE 249–257)**. Ensuring that children know how to identify the risks, who to call for help and how to report what is happening to them was important to most of the participants. A lack of safety can lead to children keeping quiet about the abuse and harm being done to them, and to break the silence, fear, stigma and social and cultural structures have to be addressed.

The participants also mentioned the lack of social workers and service inaccessibility as a reason for the community's lack of strength **(NN 200–204)**. Thus, according to them, social workers needed to be present in communities in order to prevent issues from happening and to support victims in communities with a high rate of sexual victimisation.

In the presented category, it is seen how social workers are regarded as the change agents of the community as a whole. They are able to help the community members not to be passive in different social issues related to sexual offending. By being strong and empowered, able to deal with the risk in time, understanding personal safety, and being supported by the presence of social workers, the community members will be able to better respond to different social issues related to sexual offending. This category puts emphasis on preventative community social work.

The emphasis on equipping community members with the skills and resources to address social issues finds resonance in the literature (Dushkova, & Ivlieva, 2024), which consistently points to community involvement and empowerment as key to successful reintegration processes. Reintegration is conceptualised as a multi-faceted and dynamic process that engages individual, community and systemic factors (McCartan & Richards, 2021:52). Communities, therefore, are understood as more than passive risk containers, but as active factors that can either contribute to risk or strengthen desistance when provided with the right tools and support.

Community-based initiatives, in particular, have been identified as key to lowering recidivism and facilitating reintegration in the South African context. In line with the UNODC (2022), programmes like Imbizo, ambassadorship initiatives, community forums and ex-offender desks aim to engage, inform and mobilise communities around reintegration, aftercare and livelihoods. These initiatives speak to the participants' calls for greater community engagement, increased access to services and the physical presence of social workers within communities **(NN 200–204)**.

The literature also underscores the role of social workers in empowering communities to take a more proactive stance on social issues rather than a reactive one. For example, Cardoso et al. (2025) advocate for social work interventions as a means of

mobilising and equipping communities to proactively respond to social problems, such as sexual offending, by strengthening social cohesion, safety awareness and access to support systems. This is in line with participants' perceptions that social workers should be equipping community members with practical skills, confidence and knowledge to engage with the system and better protect women and children **(DB 121–122; SIHLE 249–257).**

Community support was also understood to be multidimensional rather than one-dimensional. Li and Wang (2021) offer a conceptualisation of social support as having four key dimensions, including emotional, appraisal, informational and instrumental support. This supports the participants' expectations that social workers would offer information and raise awareness among communities, but also provides emotional reassurance, guidance and more practical assistance to communities that were experiencing high levels of sexual victimisation. This is particularly important in contexts where resources are scarce and community corrections systems underdeveloped (Wang, Abu Bakar Ah & Azman, 2025).

The literature also points to the key role of public perceptions and attitudes in reintegration processes. For example, public concerns and hostility towards sex offenders are commonly reported as significant community-level factors (McAlinden, 2016). Community attitudes towards sexual offenders are more negative than towards violent and other property offenders and shaped in part by public misperceptions about the offenders' dangerousness and risk of recidivism (Clubb et al., 2024:11). Public support for sex offender reintegration can be enhanced, however, by using offender redemption scripts that focus on offender accountability, treatment completion and redeemability, thereby increasing perceptions of an offender's capacity for change (Clubb et al., 2024:11). These findings support participants' calls to educate communities and increase their openness to reduce community fear and silence, particularly among children and vulnerable individuals **(GZ 156–159)**.

RJ practices may also help to operationalise and understand participants' expectations in ways that highlight and value the importance of community involvement, support and empowerment. RJ is defined as a range of justice practices that seek to involve victims,

offenders and communities in active processes of repairing harm and restoring social relationships (Bohmert, Duwe & Hipple, 2016:4). This is in line with social work's preventive mandate, rather than exclusion. The literature on RJ practices, therefore, further underscores the importance of community engagement, support and empowerment within the broader field of reintegration.

In sum, there is support in the literature for the participants' views that equipping community members with skills, knowledge and confidence is an important social work function within reintegration processes. By building community capacity, addressing structural factors and reshaping public perceptions and attitudes, social workers can help to create safer, more informed and more resilient communities that are better equipped to respond to sexual offending and reintegration challenges. This category therefore emphasises the importance of proactive, community-centred interventions in fostering safer environments and supporting sustainable reintegration outcomes.

- **Category 2: Evaluate impact on community and keep them informed**

This theme captures the participants' belief that reintegration should not be treated as a separate or discrete process that is disconnected from the wider community, but rather one that should be continually assessed as to how it is impacting community safety, perceptions and wellbeing. Participants also stated that social workers need to have a responsibility to track how reintegration is impacting on the community in the long-term and that community members need to be updated on a regular basis with clear, consistent and transparent communication. This was seen as crucial for allaying fear, as well as for stopping the spread of rumours and for building trust in the reintegration process.

"*And evaluate if the approach is helping the community or not".* ***(AM 155).***

"I think what social workers can do is also keep their community informed because I think knowledge is power. Knowledge is key. Once the community is informed of what is happening, there wouldn't be misrepresentation or discrimination towards the offenders, and the community would have better information on how to go about their

*day-to-day life". **(D 142-148).** "So, the community needs to be informed, and I think that's very crucial". **(D 153).***
*"In this case, social workers play a very important role. First and foremost, community engagement and sensitisation about the issues is very key". **(AR 225-226).***

*"They can do presentations to communities and bring nurses to the community. By doing so, the community will benefit from the nurses and from the awareness created. People will then be able to start engaging in these issues, because I don't think it's right for a social worker to be active only when a situation has already happened. When they analyse the data, they can paint a picture of the problem and the trend of the problem. Then the community would be given a chance to mitigate these trends, so that they don't continue happening. I think data collection, data analysis, and data management should guide awareness efforts. From that, it's a correct standpoint". **(FM 325-337).***

*"For social workers, they are at the centre of everything because they play a crucial role in the whole healing process, including integrating the systems that accommodate both victims and perpetrators. Social workers are qualified more than anybody else in society, so they should be at the forefront in making sure that the right procedures are put in place". **(FS 124-129).***

*"Yes, social workers play a key role. If anyone plays the major role in making sure that victims still feel safe being around the perpetrators, it will be the social workers, because they are in the best position and have the best opportunity to educate community members on what has happened and why this person needs to be reintegrated into the community". **(KA 76-181).***

*"Also, the community is not really aware of the work of social workers. In the intervention programmes that need to be done, social workers must be present. They should be accessible in every community. There should be a social worker that a person can interact with so they can get the assistance they need. The social worker should also be available when the offender is about to be released". **(NN 192-197).***

“I think social workers can support in this regard by making sure that sexual offenders do not return to the same community and do not get a chance to commit the offence again. They should focus on rehabilitating society instead of only rehabilitating the offenders. They should rehabilitate society by listening to its needs, understanding its fears and misconceptions, and explaining what is supposed to happen after the offender has served their time. They should also reassure the community that the sexual offender will not be given the chance to offend again”. ***(SN 279-288).***

Evaluation and information-sharing were framed as equally critical parts of the reintegration process and therefore non-negotiable for responsible reintegration management. Across the narratives, social workers were consistently expected to play a central role in judging whether and to what extent reintegration processes are working, fitting and adequate to community needs. This included both formal evaluations and constant monitoring, data collection, and reflection on community dynamics, fears and rumours.

Ascertaining information or being kept informed was repeatedly associated with community feelings of safety and control. The opposite – fear, discrimination and misrepresentation – was linked to not having access to information. Transparent communication was also expected to lead to less stigma and more certainty in community members as to how to manage daily life and interact with returnees. A few participants also noted that when communities understand what is going on, why reintegration is happening and how it will be managed safely, they are less likely to reject or exclude returnees in a knee-jerk or automatic fashion.

A number of participants expected social workers to take a more active role to facilitate this, for example by making presentations, sensitising communities and initiating feedback mechanisms. This was described as a two-way street where communities are both kept informed and given opportunities to voice concerns, contribute to problem identification and to offer their own input in developing mitigation measures. In short, social workers were expected to be translators who convert data, policies and professional expertise into community-friendly information but also who translate community realities into the reintegration process.

Implicit in these ideas was the acceptance of community fear and trauma. Participants appeared to accept that communities may well feel unsafe or be unaccepting in certain situations and that these fears must be taken seriously. Through listening, correcting misinformation, and reassuring on the basis of evidence and process, social workers were expected to stabilise communities and help them open up cautiously.

Participants' perceptions of the importance of evaluation and communication with communities receive support from literature on factors shaping community response to sexual offending and reintegration. Research by Wilson and Fox (2019:9) indicates that community responses can be characterised by fear, uncertainty and a lack of clarity on civic roles. the authors conclude that citizens do not always know how they should respond to sexual violence and reintegration and that public responses have not been focused on restorative support but on intolerance (Wilson & Fox, 2019:9). Community inclusion is a departure from the 'deficit-laden tradition of criminal justice' (Wilson & Fox, 2019:6) and a purposeful move to reintegration using a restorative, strengths-based approach that is beneficial for the whole community.

The literature on reintegration programmes recognises that communities are not at risk, but are not passive either (Wilson & Fox, 2019:10; Holler, 2019). Instead, communities' perceptions, trust and engagement are factors that can make or break the success of an offender's reintegration. This is consistent with the participants' perspectives on how social workers should not only be doing work that facilitates reintegration but also be continually evaluating if reintegration efforts are having a positive or destabilising impact on the community. Siregar, Marlina and Cahyono (2024:8689) note that holistic and tolerant management of relationships between correctional institutions and communities is vital for harmonious relationships and the social reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons.

The concept of trust is a fundamental and pervasive theme in the literature on community engagement and community capacity building. Lansing, Romero, Siantz, Silva, Center, Casteel et al. (2023:2) found that trust was a key dimension of healthy reciprocal relationships, transparent communication and the creation of safe

environments. The related literature on the use of the social presence theory in the context of online communities' engagement also found that social support and social presence influence trust, social capital and sustained participation (Algharabat & Rana, 2020). These findings support the participants' perspectives on how communities are more likely to feel safe and less discriminatory towards offenders if they are kept well informed and actively engaged.

The literature on social reintegration also recognises the significance of rumours, misinformation and communication in the reintegration process. Garg, Goel, Prateek, Roshan, Sinha, et al. (2020:470) found that the spread of rumours and false information on social media could have negative social implications in that it could "lead to an increased sense of fear and hostility in the community". Clear, consistent and transparent information, it is suggested, can be used to combat misinformation, and by extension community anxiety. This supports the participants' understanding that social workers should be keeping communities informed as part of the reintegration process to ensure that the offender is not misrepresented.

The literature on the role of social workers in the reintegration process places a responsibility on social workers to monitor the longer-term impact of reintegration efforts on community wellbeing and as reflected by participants, to maintain regular communication with community members. Stoliaryk (2025) refers to social workers as a third party that acts as an advocate, facilitator and monitor between the institution, the offender and the community. Their function as evaluators and communicators is central to the building and maintenance of trust, informed engagement and safer, inclusive reintegration practices.

So, participants' perspectives on evaluation of community impact and communication with communities are supported by the literature on sexual offending and reintegration. The literature not only supports the perspectives that were expressed by the participants but also shows that community evaluation and information-sharing are not an afterthought but a necessary component of restorative, effective and ethical reintegration practice.

- **Category 3: Community dialogue**

This category refers to participants' views on the importance of structured community dialogue in managing the reintegration of individuals who have committed sexual offences. The participants felt that community dialogue was a significant way to address community fear, stigma and emotional tension that comes with the crime of sexual offending. Community dialogue was seen as a key role for social workers, based on their skill sets of mediation, counselling and community work. Dialogue provided a way for communities to share, normalise and make sense of mixed feelings and for community members to work together for understanding and shared strategies for safety, as seen in the following narratives:

"They will promote the dialogue so that the community have understanding between offender's victims". ***(BL 168-169)****.*

"So, like I said, all the forums and the platforms that are there, social workers must be involved in those because at least they are experts, they are experts themselves". ***(NG 341-343).***

"It would help the community, so that's how social workers can be able to help their community, because then it's not like we are waiting for something to happen and then we say, oh, how do we console the community, yeah?". ***(RA 176-178)****.*

"Counselling and not checking on the family only, also to community members because people might live in fear that it might happen again, but what if it happens to me? You understand? So, I think the role of a social worker is to make sure that people are OK, and what is it that they can do to avoid things like this happening? ***(SIHLE 240-248).***

The purpose of community dialogue, however, was presented as one of a more pre-emptive and forward-looking nature rather than waiting for an event to happen and reacting to it. Dialogue was seen to be able to facilitate a community to reach common ground, mitigate fear and misunderstandings regarding sex offending and reintegration. The participants said that without dialogue, there would be no platform for the

community and thus it would be prone to being in the dark, spreading rumours and increasing fear **(BL 168–169).**

The participants nominated social workers as a fitting intermediary to initiate community dialogue. As the participants saw social workers as professionals and experts, it was thought that social workers would be able to facilitate an open and difficult conversation, reconciling differences and accommodating everyone's views **(NG 341–343)**. The community dialogue could thus include not only the offender and victim's family, but also the wider community as the participants felt that sexual offending concerns everyone.

The participants also acknowledged that despite other actions taken, communities and community members can remain fearful and have to cope with the emotional aspects, such as the fear of something similar happening again. Dialogue was also recommended as a tool to provide emotional reassurance, communal coping and shared problem-solving **(SIHLE 240–248)**.

The participants further felt that such a dialogue would need to be continuous rather than event-driven and that waiting for an event to take place and having dialogue only then would be not enough. Continuous dialogue would allow communities to be better prepared and reflect, which would help them to respond to the situation better **(RA 176–178)**. The participants felt that communities would then be able to better facilitate the reintegration of the sex offender while at the same time ensuring their safety.

The responses captured under this theme resonate with the literature, suggesting that well-structured dialogue can offer opportunities for addressing some of the drivers of fear, mistrust and stigma that can inhibit sexual offending and reintegration. In particular, the responses given by participants indicate the importance of communication, engagement and shared understanding as key aspects of a dialogical process. This perspective is consistent with the literature, which frames dialogue as a potentially powerful tool for building relational repair and a sense of shared responsibility for community reintegration (Pointer & Giles-Mitson, 2019).

One of the challenges to shifting negative attitudes to reintegration is the strongly held, and often deeply entrenched, nature of ‘us versus them’ thinking, with its dualisms of fear and trust (Stewart & Shamsi, 2015:158). Structured dialogue could be one way to access and make explicit these kinds of views, help communities understand each other better and shift from adversarial positions towards more pragmatic and inclusive ways of responding.

Dialogue is also highly compatible with RJ philosophies, which hold that sustainable responses to harm require a collective response that involves both the victim and the offender, as well as the surrounding community (Scheuerman & Keith, 2015). Theoretically, by supporting collective reflection and communication, well-structured dialogue has the potential to build community cohesion, promote procedural justice and in the long term, contribute to more effective reintegration.

Social workers are a group of professionals well placed to facilitate community dialogue around reintegration due to their skills in working with social dynamics and relationships, as well as their education and training in relation to ethical communication and working with marginalised populations. This could support the use of dialogue processes that are sensitive, ethical, structured and well managed (Pointer & Giles-Mitson, 2019; Grimm, Ruehle & Reinecke, 2024). This is further corroborated by the findings of Tuschick et al. (2024), that public awareness campaigns which focus on open communication and information sharing, can enable the reintegration process by diminishing fear, and dispelling misconceptions, as well as encouraging involvement in the community.

To summarise, it emerged from these findings that community dialogue was seen as a critical tool to help address issues that can arise from the reintegration of those who have offended sexually. Participants spoke of the need for a space where people can express their concerns, correct misconceptions and work towards mutual understanding. These storylines point to the idea that dialogue, facilitated by social workers in a sensitive and structured manner, can help to rebuild trust, reduce stigma and foster a stronger sense of community cohesion. Thus, community dialogue can be

a valuable strategy for supporting safer and more sustainable reintegration within the community.

- **Category 4: Awareness and education**

The theme has been labelled ‘Awareness and education are key’ in order to represent participants' perceptions that information sharing and learning lie at the heart of responding to and reintegrating sexual offending and doing so in a way that promotes community safety, understanding and social responsibility. Awareness was seen as something that goes beyond reactive responses after a crisis or incident. On the contrary, it was considered an active, ongoing process of educating communities to diminish stigma, clarify misconceptions and ultimately develop a community's capacity to respond to sexual harm. Education was also noted as being important in terms of prevention in that it arms communities with information about sexual offences, treatment and/or rehabilitation, and safety practices to help inform appropriate and balanced community responses. The participants commented as follows on the importance of awareness and education in this regard:

“*As I said awareness and rallies from time to time”.* ***(AM 157)****.*

“Education and awareness about the sexual offence and rehabilitation”. ***(BL 173)****.*

“In the healing process of victims and in making sure that we defeat certain stigmas about sex offenders and related issues—because social workers deal with these matters more frequently—they understand them better than we do as a society”. ***(FS 130-132).***

“Social workers can educate communities about such crimes and the impact they have on victims, families, and society at large. Not to push offenders away, but rather to include them and help them deal with the challenges and issues they are going through, and to help them reintegrate into society with clear safety measures in place”. ***(GZ 144-149).***

“And then to create awareness—it is basically about awareness. Social workers should also be resourceful enough to know which organisations exist within the community that community members can always access. So, social workers need to create awareness around sexual offending”. ***(NG 327-332).***

“I think there needs to be more awareness, because if this topic had not been brought up, ma’am, I would not have really thought about it. You understand? So, having more awareness should not only happen when an incident occurs and then everyone is gathered to talk about it. If we have more knowledge, maybe through social media, posters, or flyers, it will help”. ***(RA 170-175).***

The narratives illustrate a shared belief that awareness and education should be ongoing, and form part of everyday community life. Participants felt that knowledge empowers their communities to move forward towards more constructive engagement with issues of sexual offending and reintegration and leaving behind fear-driven reactions. Awareness was viewed as instrumental in challenging stigma, particularly by distinguishing between accountability for harm and the possibility of rehabilitation.

Participants’ positioning of social workers as appropriate facilitators for education and awareness sessions stems from the social workers’ role as professionals in this area, as well as their knowledge of sexual harm and trauma, and connections to community members. Education was not required just to provide details on the offence committed, but education should rather be focused on prevention, safety measures, available support and how to report and seek assistance. Some participants mentioned that this education and training should be done in advance as a preventative measure, rather than only after an incident. Platforms like community meetings, rallies, social media and flyers were also named as important for education and awareness.

The overall theme of this category is that awareness and education are key aspects of community responses to sexual offending and reintegration. Informing and educating communities were felt to make them more effective in protecting vulnerable individuals, reducing stigma and approaching reintegration with a more constructive mindset.

Awareness led by social workers was also seen to have a greater influence on prevention and instilling community confidence in safety and balance.

The findings under this category align closely with literature that positions public awareness and education as foundational to effective community responses to sexual offending and offender reintegration (Tuschick et al., 2025a). Research indicates that awareness initiatives play a critical role in protecting vulnerable individuals, reducing stigma and fostering more constructive societal engagement with reintegration processes (Keulen-de Vos, Kuipers, Wray & de Vogel, 2025).

Empathy and knowledge emerge as central mechanisms through which education influences public attitudes. Evidence from Dutch research demonstrates that increased understanding of sexual offending and rehabilitation, combined with empathy, significantly predicts more balanced and supportive public perceptions (Keulen-de Vos et al., 2025). In contrast, stigmatisation — often manifesting through exclusion from employment, housing and social support — continues to present substantial barriers to reintegration and may inadvertently increase the risk of recidivism (Cardoso et al., 2025; Keulen-de Vos et al., 2025;). These findings reinforce participants' views that misinformation and fear-driven responses undermine both community safety and rehabilitation efforts.

South African research further underscores the importance of educating communities about their role in reintegration of offenders. Zondi (2012:763) found that community engagement projects aimed at raising awareness significantly improved understanding of reintegration responsibilities and contributed to crime prevention. Conversely, resistance to welcoming and supporting ex-offenders was linked to limited knowledge and inadequate education among community members, highlighting how negative attitudes may stem from misinformation rather than informed assessment (Zondi, 2012:763).

The literature also emphasises the need for structured, ongoing community engagement programmes both before and after offender release. Lekalakala and Rakubu (2025) recommend the implementation of formal community engagement

initiatives that incorporate education and dialogue to address stigma and facilitate acceptance. Similarly, family support, public awareness campaigns and community education initiatives have been shown to reduce stigma, encourage social acceptance and provide platforms for communities to express concerns in constructive ways (Sathoo, Ibrahim, Sulaiman & Mohamad, 2021; Lopez, Yunn, Mohd Yazib & Kai Teng, 2020). These studies support the view that awareness and education are not optional components but essential elements of effective reintegration strategies. When led by social workers and embedded within broader community-based approaches, educational initiatives can enhance prevention efforts, strengthen community confidence and promote a balanced approach that prioritises safety while supporting rehabilitation.

4.3.3.4 Subtheme 4: The perpetrator

This subtheme contains community members' expectations and ideas about the role of social workers in working with perpetrators during reintegration. The comments revealed a need for community social workers to engage with released sexual offenders around monitoring, support and accountability. This subtheme expressed community members' desire for perpetrator-focused interventions to be included in reintegration plans on condition of safety, accountability and ongoing monitoring. This subtheme comprises of two interrelated categories, namely, monitoring and accountability, and psychosocial and rehabilitative support.

- **Category 1: Monitoring and accountability**

This category reflected community members' perceptions of the need for monitoring and accountability as essential elements in the social worker's role in reintegrating perpetrators of sexual offences. Participants expressed firm beliefs that reintegration should be subject to ongoing monitoring, organised supervision and transparent mechanisms to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. Accountability in this category was not perceived as punishment, but rather as a means to ensure community safety and as a prerequisite for trust in the reintegration process. The participants' narratives about it included the following:

"*The role of the social workers in this regard is to do monitoring and evaluation". **(AM 147)**.*

*"I think the offenders must be held accountable for their actions by regularly meeting with group volunteers, and also through the supportive aspect". **(DB 109-111).***

*"But we want to react in a way that shows it will never happen again—that the person will be kept in rehabilitation and will never be given the chance to offend you again or offend someone else. That is how social workers can assist society in this regard". **(SN 298-302).***

*"That means the person will have to take accountability and must be held accountable for their actions. The first step to healing is accepting that you are wrong". **(KA 147–150).***

The storylines in this category show that the participants perceived the monitoring and evaluation of perpetrators as non-negotiable. Social workers were held responsible for ensuring that perpetrators did not re-enter the communities unchecked. This means that monitoring and evaluation should be established as protective measures for the protection of both the community and rehabilitation processes.

In addition, participants associated accountability with scheduled activities such as meetings and support groups. This way, they could be held accountable for their actions and be monitored against their rehabilitation plan. This further implies that the participants viewed accountability as a continuous concept and not something to be done when perpetrators are about to be released or before being punished.

The participants, however, associated accountability with the acceptance of wrongdoing. This means that perpetrators had to be remorseful of their actions for them to be reintegrated in the communities. From the above statements, one could conclude that from the participants' point of view, accountability was both a moral and relational concept. The participants believed that the social workers should actively manage and monitor perpetrators. Monitoring and evaluation were not to contradict rehabilitation, but

it was for rehabilitation to take place in a way that guaranteed the safety of the community, trust and desistance of ex-offenders stopping their criminal behaviour. Although monitoring is sometimes associated with punitive control, the participants in this study positioned it as a professional social work function that is aimed at safeguarding the community while supporting structured rehabilitation and accountability.

This category has shown that the participants gave great significance to monitoring and evaluation and the accountability of perpetrators of sexual offences in the communities. The participants perceived the social workers to be the party responsible for holding perpetrators accountable. This was to be done through continuous and structured rehabilitation programmes that would help the perpetrators take responsibility for their actions.

The participants' emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and responsibility-taking in turn aligns closely with the literature, particularly literature that frames accountability as a core element of reintegration (McAlinden, 2016). In South Africa, which has been reported to have one of the highest crime and recidivism rates in the world (Marshall, 2025), structured supervision after release is often perceived as a necessity both to keep communities safe and to ensure offenders do not reoffend. It is notable, however, that participants' prioritisation of the assurance that "it will never happen again" also reflects broader concerns in the literature about public safety in environments where trust in reintegration processes may be low.

McAlinden's (2016) framework comes closest to the participants' accounts and provides a useful conceptual lens through which to view these accounts. Situating accountability in strengths-based, community-based approaches such as CoSA, this researcher's work shows how regular contact, structured engagement and professional oversight all play a role in supporting both responsibility-taking and behavioural change. This is directly reflected in participants' reference to regular meetings, action plans and group-based formats as important mechanisms to hold offenders accountable while keeping them engaged in rehabilitative work. Crucially, McAlinden (2016) also underscores that accountability is not a one-time activity but a relational process that must be repeated,

which mirrors participants' statements that accountability is an ongoing, not a symbolic or superficial, practice.

Participants again and again linked accountability to the offender's acknowledgement of having done something wrong and described acceptance of responsibility as a necessary precondition for healing and reintegration. This emphasis finds support in the desistance literature, which shows that cognitive transformation and acknowledgement of past harm are important preconditions for the emergence of a non-offending identity (McAlinden, 2016). Seen in this light, participants' calls for offenders to 'take account' and show an understanding of accountability as a moral and behavioural expectation, not just a procedural expectation.

The literature also affirms participants' positioning of social workers as primary agents in charge of managing this accountability. Social workers serving in forensic and correctional environments are well recognised as having a dual role that combines elements of both support and control (Law, 2017; Walker, 2020). While participants in the present study framed the idea of monitoring in terms of safety and reassurance, the literature clarifies that this monitoring typically takes place as part of professional case management, assessment and review rather than surveillance or punishment. As Law (2017) notes, the core values that underpin social work – including the values of human dignity, social justice, empowerment and ethical responsibility – are in no way suspended in correctional environments but do shape how accountability is operationalised.

The social work role in this regard is further specified in the South African context by legislation and policy. According to the mandate of the DCS, social workers are responsible for the assessment of offenders, for the implementation of individualised, needs-based programmes and for support of parolees during the period of reintegration in the community (RSA, 1998; RSA, 2019). The participants' view that social workers should "monitor and evaluate" is thus consistent with the statutory mandate, which also prescribes a role for social workers that requires engagement, documentation and intervention at multiple points over the entire period of parole (Du Plessis & Lombard, 2018:482; Singh, 2016).

The literature, however, also cautions about challenges related to the role of social work in this regard. Research has pointed to problems with high caseloads, lack of resources, poor coordination with other professionals and safety concerns for social workers in community settings (Murhula & Singh, 2019:27; Ramokolo-Kutu & Botha, 2025:961). Seen in light of these constraints, the participants' strong preference for visible and consistent monitoring can be understood as a reflection of structural limitations and systemic pressures.

In sum, the literature affirms participants' construction of monitoring and accountability as necessary, structured and ongoing aspects of the reintegration process. The participants' accounts converge with the literature on this aspect by portraying accountability as something that does not simply punish but is a professional, ethical and relational process by which social workers support offender change while helping to protect the community.

This category reveals that participants perceived monitoring and accountability as essential prerequisites for the reintegration of sexual offenders. In particular, social workers were seen as responsible for ensuring accountability measures as continuous, structured and visible via regular oversight and responsibility-taking. Consequently, monitoring was not regarded as punishment but as a professional safety net that upholds trust and safety.

These findings establish accountability as the structural foundation of reintegration, needed to create the conditions under which rehabilitation can occur. The following category builds on this foundation by examining how psychosocial and rehabilitative support functions are expected to operate within accountable reintegration frameworks.

- **Category 2: Psychosocial and rehabilitative support**

This category focuses on community members' views regarding the psychosocial and rehabilitative support that social workers should provide to perpetrators during the reintegration process. Participants emphasised the importance of counselling, mental health support and interventions to address the underlying factors associated with

sexual offending. Psychosocial support was, seen as follows by the participants as a function that complemented, rather than replaces, accountable reintegration processes:

"I just guess educating them—like giving them the awareness that most of the time, what I've come to realise is that it's psychological. You're not emotionally and mentally right as well, you know. So, they could perhaps see a psychiatrist, because most of the time they have their own issues that might have started during their childhood, basically" ***(D 77–78).*** *"So, I do think the accountability programmes would really help, because, you know, it takes a community to raise a child".* ***(D 132–135).***

"Again, the offenders should be given psychological attention. Most of the time, it has to do with emotional intelligence and stress-related issues". ***(AR 198–204).***

"You cannot just have one programme. You don't have a generic programme; you need to find out what their needs are". ***(FM 263–270).*** *"Support and accountability programmes require people to first acknowledge that what they have done was wrong. Then they will find ownership and accountability".* ***(FM 282–290).***

The narratives indicate that participants strongly believe that reintegration is linked with the need for psychological and emotional intervention. Sexual offending is framed as starting with unresolved mental health challenges, or negative childhood experiences. The participants viewed counselling as needed to address the reasons for the offending behaviour. Participants also believe that interventions should be individualised and based on needs identified. This reflects an implicit awareness that perpetrators are not the same and, therefore, should receive different rehabilitative services.

Crucially, psychosocial support was not perceived as a substitute for accountability but as a means through which to achieve accountability. Participants connected counselling and therapeutic interventions with acknowledgement of wrongdoing, personal insight and the development of responsibility. In this sense, rehabilitation was understood as a process that can help the offender to internalise accountability as opposed to only being externally controlled. The narratives also reflected a recognition of rehabilitation as a collective process that involves professional support and, at times, community-based

interventions. References to communal responsibility and structured programmes suggest that psychosocial support is expected to take place within coordinated systems rather than in isolation.

The category illustrates that members of the community view psychosocial and rehabilitative support as an essential element of reintegration if delivered together with clear accountability arrangements. The social workers were seen to be in charge of providing counselling, mental health interventions and needs-based programmes that would deal with the causes of offending behaviour. The findings indicate that, from the community's perspective, long-term reintegration is conditional not only on monitoring but also on a meaningful therapeutic engagement that supports behavioural change and long-term desistance.

The focus on counselling, psychological intervention and needs-based rehabilitation expressed by participants is strongly supported by the literature on sexual offending and reintegration. Social workers and other professionals are broadly considered to play a central role in preventing sexual abuse perpetration and re-perpetration through therapeutic and rehabilitative involvement (Lindgren, 2020). This involves not only addressing crisis situations but also providing ongoing psychosocial support for the emotional, cognitive and behavioural drivers of offending.

It is consistent with the literature that points out rehabilitation works best when provided in a community-based context. Advocating for the community-based rehabilitation of sexual offenders, Dalwadi and Sharma (2025) state that treatment within the offenders' natural social environments allows rehabilitation to happen in real-world settings in which behavioural change is modelled and practised with supervision and support. Community-based programmes are associated with lower rates of reoffending and safer reintegration. This is attributed to the combination of ongoing treatment, monitoring and regular assessment to which offenders are subjected to structured community programmes.

It is noted that the earlier literature provided in this study states that psychosocial support for perpetrators is typically provided within statutory and ethical constraints.

Treatment court orders, mandatory reporting and restricted confidentiality create complex and challenging professional situations in which social workers are required to manage client-centred care alongside public protection (Walker, 2020). In the South African context, psychosocial and rehabilitative support for offenders is specifically included in the statutory mandate of the DCS. Social workers are required to provide needs-based interventions that aim to enhance parolees' adjustment, social functioning and reintegration (RSA, 1998; Singh, 2016). Rehabilitation is viewed as a continuous process of support and development that begins during incarceration and continues during community supervision, resonating with participants' view that counselling and psychological support should not be episodic.

In short, the literature on psychosocial and rehabilitative support is largely consistent with participants' narratives. It strongly positions this type of support as a necessary and essential pillar of reintegration. Therapeutic intervention, where provided in structured and accountable settings, can help with behavioural change, responsibility taking and long-term desistance. This similarity between participant views and literature provides support for the legitimacy of social workers' rehabilitative role in combination with their accountability functions when reintegrating people who have committed sexual offences.

4.3.4.5 Subtheme 5: Systemic and integrative roles of social workers in the reintegration process

The second subtheme echoes participants' perception of the macro-systemic roles played by social workers in the reintegration of sex offenders. The activities noted within this subtheme contrast to those of the previous one in that they are not limited to working directly with victims, families, communities, or perpetrators, but rather apply to all of these areas, and ensure the sustainability, coordination and effectiveness of all the activities noted above. Within this subtheme, participants perceived the roles of social workers as multi-levelled, and taking place not only at the interpersonal level, but at organisational, policy, and research knowledge-producing levels, which impact practice at the interpersonal level.

The following four categories were noted by participants in this subtheme as the specific ways in which social workers can play a role in the reintegration of sex offenders at a macro-systemic level: research and data-informed practice, advocacy in terms of policy development and human rights, co-ordinated counselling and restorative facilitation, and the creation of a restorative encounter between victims and perpetrators. The four categories can be seen as the integrative role of social workers in coordinating practice with policy and community systems in order to address the recurrence of sexual crimes, hold perpetrators accountable and effect social reintegration in the long-term.

- **Category 1: Research and data-informed practice**

Participants situated research and data-informed practice as another major, often under-recognised social work contribution in the reintegration of individuals who have committed sexual offences. Community members conceptualised social workers not just as service providers, but also as knowledge producers, interpreters, and users who can understand the dynamics of sexual offending, patterns, and the time periods during which such offending peaks, as well as inform prevention and reintegration. This category, therefore, represents the understanding that research, systematic data collection, and analysis should form a foundation for decision-making, community safety, and evidence-based social work practice.

Despite being only reported by one participant as follows, this category provided a unique and analytically interesting angle on the specific dimensions of social workers as data-informed practitioners as well as the role of research in preventive and reintegrative responses of sex offenders:

"I think, first of all, it starts by collecting data. It's very important to know when these things happen. For example, some incidents happen during festive seasons, where people are sexually offended while coming from the beach, after hiring a taxi, or when they are with friends drinking. These things happen more often on Fridays and similar times. The support of social workers will bring an integrated approach, to say: as human beings, you need to take care of yourself. You need to be aware before you engage,

*before you indulge in alcohol, or before you visit your friends at night, just to understand that these things are happening". **(FM 305-324).***

The above narrative demonstrates the participants' understanding that research and data collection inform social workers from reactive action to preventive actions. Emphasis was placed on temporal patterns, such as seasonal changes during festive seasons or weekends, and contextual factors like intoxication and mobility as significant contributing factors. In this context, the role of social workers was constructed as that of professionals able to convert observed patterns into tangible safety information, targeted awareness campaigns, and strategic reintegration planning.

The focus on the need for data also emerged as the participants appeared to understand that working with reintegration is not only about working with the offenders. It involves a deeper analysis of the larger social context that can make individuals vulnerable or put the community at risk. By gathering and analysing data, social workers are constructed as being able to approach their work more holistically, in a way that better positions them to not only work with individual offenders, but also inform community education, and individual behaviour change and be involved in developing prevention strategies. Thus, a significant role for the social worker is positioned in the form of research for the purpose of being more accountable and able to protect the community and contribute to successful and sustainable reintegration.

Consistent with the literature on the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, the participant noted that research and data-informed practice play an important role in these endeavours. A number of studies found that research is a necessary step towards the identification of crime trends, risk factors, and the development of intervention strategies (Cook et al., 2013; Islam, 2023). Sexual offences have been found to be one of the most harmful and least reported crimes around the world, a fact that further substantiates the importance of investigative and analytical approaches to the problem (Chan, cited in Fox, Burckley & Corona, 2021:17).

As Chikadzi (2017:288) pointed out, social workers working with offenders must understand the psychosocial and structural contexts in which ex-offenders live in order to be able to diminish their chances of reoffending. A lack of a response to emotional anguish, the stigma and social marginalisation, as well as situational risk and protection factors, is likely to lead to the failure of reintegration and to the persistence or development of reoffending patterns. In this context, a data-driven practice would assist a social worker to evaluate risk and to plan for intervention more efficiently.

In addition, by engaging in systematic assessment and risk management, an experienced social worker is in a better position to provide evidence of competent practice in the context of offender reintegration (Chikadzi, 2017; Brady, Burgess & Osrin 2022). In this way, the empirical approach to the task, from the micro to the macro level, allows a social worker to contribute to an integrated, preventative, and context-responsive approach.

This category highlights research as a supportive function of social work within the reintegration process. The narrative underscores the importance of data collection and analysis in informing interventions. The findings further suggest that research enables social workers to move beyond reactive practice by identifying patterns of risk and vulnerability. This can strengthen evidence-based decision-making, more effective reintegration strategies for offenders, and also better safety for victims and communities.

- **Category 2: Advocate for policies and the protection of human rights**

This category indicated that some community members viewed the role of social workers as a systemic responsibility that went beyond social workers' direct practice in reintegration. It included influencing and advocating policy and practice related to the protection of human rights. In this sense, participants viewed social workers as follows as agents of change that could impact structural conditions, including inequalities, and hold reintegration practices accountable for being ethical, rights-based, addressing concerns of community safety and social justice:

“I think social workers can advocate for policies that reduce inequality and to protect the human right”. ***(DB 119-120)****.*

“*Develop certain policies”.* ***(NG 326)****.*

Embedded in the stories is an implicit understanding that social workers have an obligation to engage in policy environments. Participants shared a sense of discontent with ‘what is not there’, or not working in the social landscape in policy gaps, practice, or even service implementation in relation to sexual offending and reintegration. The narratives suggest that in their work, social workers needed to be ‘kind of advocating’ or making sure that reintegration is not just a process that proceeds from some punitive ‘idea’ or ‘drive to exact vengeance’, but one that is cognisant of dignity, fairness, and the capacity of people to grow and change. The position reflects a view that people’s rehabilitation is dependent on the socio-political environment in which offenders, victims, and communities are embedded.

The call for policy advocacy also reveals a sense that if reintegration policies are not up-to-date or they do not work, they may lead to stigmatisation, exclusion, and unsafe reintegration practices. The stories reflect a view that social workers, as a group, have a unique and necessary role to contribute to bridging the realities of practice with policy-making and law-making by virtue of their professional knowledge base and ethical imperatives to the broader policy environment. This suggests that social work advocacy was understood to play a protective role for the rights of the offender, victim, and community by striving for more coherent, evidence-informed, and humane reintegration frameworks.

The participants’ views are consistent with social work literature that frames advocacy as a central aspect of the profession. Chikadzi (2017:295) argues that the belief in the potential for change in people’s lives, which is central to social work practice, must be matched by the profession’s engagement in policy processes that facilitate rehabilitation instead of exclusion. Mpofu, Mkhize and Akpan (2024) further state that policies rooted in the principles of dignity restoration and trauma-informed responses have the potential

to reshape the criminal justice system's responses to offenders in ways that address the causes of offending behaviour while also protecting the rights of the victims.

According to Tuschick et al. (2025a:10), the effectiveness of policies related to sexual offending and reintegration is still a subject of global debate, which further highlights the importance of ongoing policy review informed by empirical evidence and practice experience. Lytle (2019) further notes that policy failures and implementation challenges are often the results of misaligned policy objectives or implementation inefficiencies, which is why it is crucial for practitioners to be involved in policy development processes. In this context, social workers' advocacy roles can be particularly important for the development of policies that ensure a balance between accountability, rehabilitation, and community safety.

In general, the category shows that community members see policy advocacy and human rights protection as important aspects of social workers' involvement in reintegration. Advocacy was seen as necessary for creating the right conditions for ethical and sustainable rehabilitation, which can, in turn, strengthen the entire reintegration process.

- **Category 3: Co-ordinated counselling and restorative facilitation**

This category captured the perspective that social workers were perceived to be in a central co-ordinating role to provide counselling and restorative processes when reintegrating people who have been offended sexually. Also only reported by one participant, the participant was clear that counselling should not be siloed to the individual victim or individual offender but rather needs to be implemented in a planned, co-ordinated way, potentially including family and the community as appropriate. In this way, social workers were seen as the professionals who would link therapeutic support with restorative approaches, with attention to safety, trauma and ethics.

"Group counselling and family counselling should be done in this regard". ***(AM 156)****.*

Despite being communicated through a single storyline, this narrative warrants analytic unpacking. On the one hand, it suggests a somewhat broad expectation that counselling be collective, relational, and deliberately structured rather than fragmented. The preference for group and family counselling signals a perception that sexual offending and reintegration have ripple effects which reverberate through social and family systems rather than remaining isolated in the offender or the victim. By contrast, the role of the social worker in 'bringing these things together' is implicit rather than elaborated. Social workers, it may be inferred from this narrative, are considered to be positioned to hold these many facets simultaneously by coordinating interventions and processes around trauma, fear, accountability, and reintegration. The notion that counselling could function as a mechanism to reduce anxiety in community and simultaneously support longer-term reintegration is also noteworthy.

The participant's emphasis on the need for co-ordinated counselling is consistent with literature which has detailed the long-term emotional, psychological, and relational consequences of sexual violence on both victims and their families. Counselling and therapeutic support are widely accepted to be a core mechanism for helping victims and families to heal, rebuild a sense of safety, and develop coping strategies in the aftermath of sexual harm (Step to Hope, 2023). Family-based and group interventions can strengthen the relational fabric within which healing occurs and broadens the capacity to develop collective resilience.

From the perspective of RJ theory and practice, the role of counselling and facilitative processes in repairing harm, restoring relationships, and addressing the social ripple effects of crime has also been extensively discussed (Keeling, 2019:2-3). A restorative perspective also resonates with the preference for co-ordinated, professional intervention noted by participants. A commitment to a safe, voluntary, and therapeutically prepared process is core to restorative work, especially in cases of sexual harm where there is a pronounced risk of power imbalances and secondary trauma (Gavina, Kitea, Portera, McCartan & Cawley, 2023). Social workers are also, by virtue of their training, well-placed to co-ordinate processes such as this by drawing on their knowledge of trauma-informed practice, ethical decision-making, and system-based intervention.

Collaboration between correctional services, social workers, and stakeholders has also been linked to more effective reintegration and lower recidivism in literature. Richards, et al. (2020) note that a range of therapeutic and restorative interventions, when co-ordinated and multi-disciplinary, can support community safety by supporting accountability and addressing psychosocial needs. Within the South African context, the call for integrated counselling and restorative facilitation also aligns with broader critiques of the challenges of fragmented service delivery and the need for holistic, multi-stakeholder responses to sexual offending and reintegration.

Taken together, this literature corroborates the view that counselling, especially when co-ordinated and integrated within restorative frameworks, is a core social work function in the management of reintegration which is both ethically and trauma-informed and responsive to victims, families, and the wider community.

- **Category 4: The facilitation of restorative encounters between victims and perpetrators**

This category represents perspectives about the possibility for social workers to act as a bridge for the interaction between the victims and the perpetrators as a part of the reintegration process. A participant emphasised that such interaction must be very delicate and should only occur under certain conditions. In this case, social workers need to be at the centre of this process to ensure victims' safety, voluntariness and readiness while holding perpetrators accountable and creating awareness and acceptance of the wrongdoing done to the victims and community in general.

"Arrange an excursion for offenders, maybe to such a place, so that they are allowed to expose themselves to the victims and talk to them". ***(MN 384–386).***

The extract, although offered in passing, is an indication of qualified support for restorative engagement if it were properly designed and professionally delivered. The emphasis by the participant on the need for meetings to be "organised in such a way that they let them expose themselves to the victims" seems to mean that the participant was expecting offenders to be in a sense exposed to the consequences of their actions,

rather than learning and going away, as it were, unaffected by them. On the other hand, the use of the storyline by the participant also assumes that exposure will not take place as of right and by fault, but that the organisation of the meeting, its preparation and its containment will be part of the task of the social workers.

This is what is suggested by the storyline when it indicates that it is the responsibility of the social worker to consider the meeting, to ascertain whether it is appropriate, as well as in what circumstances and at what point in the process it should take place. This, in the participant's eyes, is also to ensure that victims will not be re-traumatised and that participation will be a voluntary decision on their part. Also, emphasis was put by the participants on the meeting being 'facilitated' rather than being allowed to be an experience where victims confront the offender in a confrontational setting.

Facilitating victim–perpetrator meetings is primarily linked to RJ, an approach to repairing harm that involves the voluntary participation of those who have been harmed, the responsible parties, and sometimes community members in a facilitated conversation (Keeling, 2019:4). The use of RJ in sexual violence cases remains contested due to concerns over power dynamics, safety, and the potential for further harm (Gavina et al., 2023). Literature on the subject points out the importance of a rigorous assessment of each situation, a survivor-led approach, and the involvement of trained practitioners at all times.

Maluleke, Matshaba, Kgosimore, and Barkhuizen (2020) argue that the outcomes of restorative encounters should be aimed at making amends and rebuilding broken social ties, not reconciliation or forgiveness. In a similar fashion, participants' underlying assumptions suggest that meetings should facilitate the offender's taking responsibility and the victim's having her experience acknowledged without jeopardising her autonomy. In a related study, Richards, et al. (2020) explores the impact of formal restorative practices on community safety. The authors conclude that practices based on a restorative framework (including RJ embedded in Circles of Support and Accountability) increased compliance, responsibility and insight in offenders.

It seems that social workers' involvement is deemed pivotal due to their expertise and the skills to deal with complex relational processes. The literature on the subject points to the profession's key role in case preparation, setting boundaries, and, in general, ensuring that restorative engagement is not conducted at the expense of the victim's safety. Informed by restorative principles, social workers might understand the meeting between the victim and the perpetrator not as a standard intervention, but as a process that needs to be negotiated and that might contribute to healing, responsibility, and safer reintegration when managed appropriately.

The participant's story and the literature consulted reinforce the idea that victim–perpetrator meetings can be an additional, cautious, and potentially meaningful element in the reintegration process when facilitated by social workers within a restorative and trauma-informed framework.

The theme 'role of social workers in the reintegration process' is consistent with and informed by Bronfenbrenner's EST and the related person-in-environment (PIE) approach that informs current social work. The PIE focuses on social, relational, and structural forces in both casework, group work, and community interventions are deeply ecological and foundational to social work (Cheung & Leung, 2020:2).

In this theme, social workers are seen as ecological practitioners engaged at all EST levels. At the microsystem, they address the needs of victims, offenders, and families in their care, including biopsychosocial needs, trauma, accountability, and behavioural change. At the mesosystem level, social workers can co-ordinate linkages among families, communities, correctional services, NGOs, and support networks, thus, facilitating stronger connections between systems that have a co-active influence on reintegration. At the exosystem, engagement with the institutional context of offenders and victims, including service availability, organisational resources, and interdepartmental linkages, that have an indirect influence on reintegration, is evident. At the macrosystem level, social workers' advocacy for policy, human rights, dignity, and social inclusion demonstrate an awareness of and responsiveness to wider social, political, cultural, and economic influences that shape public perceptions of offending and reintegration (Cheung & Leung, 2020:3).

Positioning social workers in terms of EST levels is particularly apt in the South African context where rehabilitation and reintegration are seen as a collective responsibility and not a sole responsibility of the criminal justice system (Chikadzi, 2017; Lekganyane & Manganyi, 2023). The skills and expertise of social workers position them to work on social exclusion, support law-abiding identities, and co-ordinate offender, victim, family, and community networks of care (Manuel & Joseph, 2024:4). In this regard, they are enacting Bronfenbrenner's EST logic by intervening at individual, relational, institutional, and structural levels simultaneously.

In conclusion, the findings of this theme suggest that the role of social workers in reintegration is ecological in nature. Social work practice aligns with and actualises the core assumptions of EST by demonstrating that sustainable reintegration is predicated on the dynamic interaction between persons and the nested systems that influence their lives over time rather than on isolated or solely punitive responses.

4.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

Chapter Four, includes a biographical profile of the participants, outlining their key demographic characteristics to provide contextual depth and to situate the findings within participants' social and community backgrounds. A thematic structure is presented involving detailed documentation of community members' perceptions, views, and experiences of the reintegration process for people who have committed sexual offences.

The first theme consists of the participants' views on the exposure and understanding of sexual offences and the reintegration offenders after serving sentencing.

The second theme reflects the community's reaction to the reintegration of sexual offenders into the community.

The third theme dealt with the management of the reintegration process.,

The fourth theme, on the social workers' role in the reintegration process, consists of subthemes with their categories.

This research report is concluded in the next chapter presenting a summary, its limitations, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This last chapter synthesises the content of the preceding chapters and offers an analysis to assess whether the goal and objectives of the research were met. It contains a chapter wise outline and conclusion of the research report that provides a comprehensive synopsis of the general orientation, literature review and theoretical framework, application of the qualitative research process, and the research findings. This is followed by the evaluation of the attainment of the research question, goal and objectives; limitations; recommendations; and value of the study.

5.2 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION - CHAPTER 1 GENERAL ORIENTATION

Chapter 1 of the dissertation establishes a clear framework for the study. An overview is provided of the research problem, identifying the research gap and formulating the aim, objectives, and research questions for the study. The chapter contextualised the research problem of sexual offending and reintegration of people who have committed sexual offences into communities. This is done by acknowledging the underlying issues, particularly the inherent tension between community safety and the stigmatisation and rehabilitation of sex offenders and justifying the need for the study by clearly identifying the gap about it in the social work knowledge base. The chapter provides the background and motivation for the study by locating the research problem within the South African context and pointing out the relevance and urgency of the topic, including the challenges of high crime, recidivism, and fear of sexual crimes within communities.

The problem statement clearly articulated the dissonance between policies that emphasise rehabilitation and reintegration and the realities of community members who experience stigma, fear, and trauma. Effectively identified are the gap and the need for further exploration and understanding of community perspectives. This informed the study's aim, objectives, and research questions, which focus on exploring and

describing the community's perspectives on sex offender reintegration and providing recommendations for social work practice. The study's significance is outlined in relation to social work practice, policy development, and knowledge advancement. By clearly articulating the research questions and objectives, the chapter set the direction for the research process and structured the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

The scope and delimitations of the study are clearly indicated, providing transparency about its boundaries and extent. The chapter provides clear and consistent definitions of key concepts central to the research, such as sexual offences, reintegration, community, and social work intervention. This ensured conceptual clarity and consistency in the dissertation. The chapter provides an overview of the research methodology, offering a brief introduction and priming the reader for the in-depth discussion of the study's methods. In conclusion the ethical requirements, structure of the research report, and dissemination of research results are discussed.

Chapter 1 lays a foundation for the remaining chapters by justifying the need for the study, providing a clear and concise statement of the problem, outlining the aim, objectives, and research questions of the study, and clearly defining the scope and delimitations of the study.

5.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION - CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 2 gives a general and an in-depth review of literature and the existing body of scholarship on sexual offending, reintegration, community responses to sex offenders and social workers' roles in reintegration. The chapter also focuses on an integration of relevant literature with the central themes of the study. Theoretical concepts are explicated. National and international related scholarships are appraised, thus demonstrating contextualising the scope of the study and addressing research gaps and providing a rationale for the current research. The nature and impact of sexual offences, stigma and public fears patterns and correlations are discussed. Difficulties in the reintegration of sexual offenders as well as psychosocial, family and community-level impacts of sexual crime are investigated, With the emphasis emerging issues and

scholarships as well as areas where more studies are needed and could usefully be done.

The literature suggested that sexual offending is not merely individual criminal behaviour but also affects victims, families, communities and many social institutions, with the most common themes addressed in the studies dealing with trauma, recidivism and fears, social exclusion, and moral panic. It informs and contributes to community attitudes, which are essential for reintegration. The literature review also showed that offenders' reintegration still is one of the most difficult phases of their desistance and that negative perceptions, public stigma and reactions were some of the biggest obstacles to offenders' reintegration. Emphasis is also placed on rehabilitation and reintegration frameworks, like the strengths-based approach, the use of restorative justice, and evidence-informed programmes and models for the reintegration of sex offenders such as CoSA (Clarke, Brown, & Völlm, 2017). These matters are based on the principles of accountability, responsible mentoring, and community involvement to maximise protection and resistance from recidivism. Parenting and family responsibilities and their role in offenders' reintegration have been the focus of several studies. Studies show that offenders' families, and those of the victims, are likely to be at risk of secondary trauma, stigmatisation and other psychosocial as well as emotional strains.

The part of the chapter looking at the role of social workers in reintegration, draws attention to the roles of social workers dealing with the individual, community, and interagency levels in reintegration efforts. This includes direct practice, case management, service coordination, and trauma-informed care. Also included are case monitoring and public education, and their ethical tensions, such as that of care and control or accountability and public protection, the therapeutic role of community, the limits of knowledge, and dual relationships. Previous research supports the fact that sex offender reintegration practices are able to be successful only if done in a timely, coordinated, and multidisciplinary manner. This places a special focus on the social worker's ethical responsibility regarding issues such as offender accountability, confidentiality, and public safety.

At the end of the chapter, the theoretical framework for the study is described. Selecting the systems theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST) are described, and a general justification is given for the choice of these theoretical frameworks for the study. The theories provided an organised way of looking at reintegration and the community's response as influenced by their interrelationships and interactions on different levels between individuals, families, the community, its institutions and their systems, and their relationship with the socio-cultural environment and the prevailing criminal justice policies and the general systems of society.

The literature review in Chapter 2 built a valid foundation for the study by identifying the conceptual and theoretical gaps in the existing body of research. The chapter shows that while there has been a lot of focus on the offenders and victims of sexual crimes, less attention has been paid to community views on reintegration as a key constituent of the process and this formed the gap and direct need for the current study, and its qualitative exploration.

It can be concluded that sex offender reintegration is a socially challenging process that needs a more specific social work engagement on individual, family, and community levels. Social workers are key facilitators to the intervention between the offender, the victim, the family, and the community. The functions and interventions of the social worker in this regard are more widely spread across dimensions such as the care for victims' families, working through emotional support for both parties, family dynamics, community interventions, reintegration into community life, and offenders' safety.

The theoretical framework that was used in the study enhanced the study in several ways. It firstly offered a clear structured approach to both data analysis and interpretation. The framework, which drew on Bronfenbrenner's EST, allowed the study to place community perspectives on sex offender reintegration in context. This approach enabled the study to describe reintegration as a process that is influenced by interactions and transactions across various systems, from the individual level to the broader levels in society. In this way, the framework provided a lens through which the study could explore the complex and sometimes conflicting roles of social workers, victims, family members and the community in the reintegration process.

Secondly, the framework also helped to increase the study's theoretical consistence, as it aligned with social work values and practice principles, specifically with its accent on social justice, empowerment, and collective responsibility. The framework allowed the study to interpret and make sense of the concurrent presence of feelings like stigmatisation, fear, trauma and support in community perspectives, and how social work interventions can potentially mediate this complexity.

The framework assisted me to connect the findings of the study with what social workers can do and already do in practice, and to provide useful recommendations for future use. It also strengthened the study's contribution to knowledge and supported social workers in understanding and improving offender reintegration.

5.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS - CHAPTER 3 APPLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research approach and the research design used in the study. In this chapter, research design and approach, study population and sampling, data collection, pilot testing and data analysis are discussed. The issues of credibility and quality of the data generated and the ethical issues surrounding the conducting of research with human participants are also addressed.

I used a qualitative research approach because I aimed to explore and describe the community perspectives regarding sex offender reintegration into the community. The qualitative approach was suitable for the study as it is sensitive in nature and enabled me to explore and describe the participants' community perspectives on sex offender reintegration into the community.

The research designs that were implemented in the study were the explorative, contextual, and descriptive research designs. The implementation of the explorative research design was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to explore and discover the community members' different perspectives on sex offender reintegration into the community. As indicated in Chapter 1, there is a lack of research on community

perspectives on sex offender reintegration into the community, and using the explorative research design allowed me to garner new insights and thereby contribute to contribute to closing the gap in the social work knowledge base. Through the use of the contextual research design, I was able to obtain an understanding of and insight into the participants' perspectives within their own community, the way in which they related to each other as members of the community, how it affected them, the victims and their families. The descriptive research design was also considered fitting as it allowed the researcher to describe the participants' perspectives on sex offender reintegration into the community.

The research population for the study consisted of community members from age 18 to 60 who reside at Mamelodi township in Pretoria. The purposive sampling technique was employed, and specific inclusion criteria for participants were developed to ensure that the data collected were relevant to the purpose of the research. The researcher obtained ethical clearance for undertaking the study and conducted a pilot test with two participants. After amendment to the interview guide following the pilot testing, the researcher proceeded with the recruitment of participants. This was done through local community meetings. Prospective participants were provided with information about the background of the study, ethical approval of the study, and data collection methods to be applied. Prospective participants, who were willing to form part of the study (and met the inclusion criteria) were contacted via email and provided with an informed consent form to complete. Thereafter the researcher made appointments to conduct online interviews with the participants (via Microsoft Teams). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants until data saturation was reached. This happened when 15 participants were interviewed. Interviews then were suspended. The data collected through the interviews were transcribed and then analysed using Tesch 's steps (cited in Creswell (2014:198) (as detailed in section 3.4). An independent coder was employed to do the analysis to increase the comprehensiveness and trustworthiness of the study (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo, 2019). After the researcher and independent coder's analyses were made, a comparison of the themes and subthemes generated was made, and any differences were discussed until an agreement was reached on the final themes and subthemes. The final themes were discussed with the research supervisor for

agreement on their consistency with the study objectives and the methodological perspective.

I used purposive sampling techniques to select participants. The use of semi-structured interviews (virtual) was appropriate as the information shared by the participants was expressive, rich and descriptive. The data analysis strategy I used was appropriate as it allowed me to make sense out of the data, by identifying themes, subthemes and categories that contained meaningful information to the study.

To establish rigor and trustworthiness of the study, I used the Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria for rigor and trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability). It had a great impact on the study as it affected the entire research process and the study's validity. Addressing each criterion systematically helped to ensure that the study was conducted with rigor, that its results are trustworthy, and that the study's findings accurately reflect what the participants said and experienced in their daily lives. In particular, credibility increased the quality of the findings, making them more meaningful and impactful for understanding; transferability increased the relevance and contextual applicability of the findings; dependability and confirmability strengthened the validity of the research by ensuring that the study's findings are consistent and can be independently confirmed. The use of audit trail and reflexivity have proven that the study's conclusions are based on the data collected and not on the researchers' personal biases, which increased the credibility of the study. The Lincoln and Guba (1985) model strengthened the factual underpinnings of the study and established its credibility and increased the overall integrity of the research's results.

In this study, the I used informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, management of information, debriefing of the participants, and beneficence as ethical considerations. The incorporation of these ethical guidelines helped to enhance the study's overall quality, adhere to good research practice and the protection of its participants (Liamputtong, 2019). Informed consent was established to ensure that the participants were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Assuring the participants of anonymity and confidentiality helped in the protection of their identity and thus, the research was in a position to obtain sensitive information.

The information collected are stored in a secure storage facility to prevent its unauthorised access and to ensure the integrity of the research findings. In this research, the availability of a debriefing resource for participants and maintaining the ethical principle of beneficence by acting in the best interest of the participants, demonstrated my commitment not only to the advancement of knowledge but also to the welfare of the participants.

Each of these elements of the research process are described to show how the methodological decisions supported and were linked to the purpose, aims and objectives of the study and facilitated an in-depth exploration of the views held by members of the community regarding the reintegration of sex offenders.

5.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS– CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the research findings and their overall placement in the context of the research. Fifteen research participants who met the inclusion criteria were interviewed, and their biographical characteristics are presented to provide background information for a better understanding of the results. It also indicates how the social position and community of each participant influenced their perspective. Through the results of the data analysis, four themes, with subthemes and categories, were deduced, as described below.

5.5.1 Theme 1: Exposure and understanding of sexual offences and reintegration after serving sentence

Theme 1 was created in response to the question that pertained to community members' understandings of sexual offences and its perceived impact. The data demonstrate that participants had a relatively consistent and informed sense of what sexual offences were, based on multiple experiences, observations, and emotional responses. Descriptions of sexual offences were most often based on the absence of consent, the use of force or coercion, and the exploitation of vulnerability. As presented in the data, participants conceptualised sexual offences as including a range of acts, such as non-consensual sexual activity, rape, molestation, harassment, and sexual exploitation. Sexual offences were also described in terms of who was affected by them, which was

explained to include both adults and children. Women and children were most often referred to as being particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual offences.

In addition, the data showed that participants described a range of consequences of sexual offences, which were considered to have implications for victims, families, and the community as a whole. The experiences of victims were consistently described as including physical injury, emotional trauma, fear, shame, and long-term psychological distress. In addition to the effects on direct victims, participants spoke about family members suffering secondary trauma and related consequences, including stigmatisation, broken relationships, and emotional burden. Sexual offences were also said to have community-level consequences, described by participants as resulting in community characterised by fear, mistrust, anger, and an increased sense of insecurity. At a community level, participants were consistent in describing sexual offences as having a negative impact on social cohesion and an environment in which both children and adults felt unsafe.

The data showed that sexual offences were not only described as individual criminal acts, but as social harms that destabilise a range of systems within the community. In many accounts, it was shared that victims are not always met with appropriate familial support after disclosing the offence, which can lead to feelings of isolation, loss of self-worth, and shame. In this way, the original harm was understood to be compounded by familial responses which were also described as further reinforcing stigma within families and the community more generally.

Drawing on the systems lens, the findings of Theme 1 suggest that sexual offences are understood to disrupt the functioning and equilibrium of individuals, families, and the community as a whole. The concept of resilience – described as the “capacity of a system to adapt in the face of adversity in order to survive, and to develop” (Masten, 2014:1; 2015) – can be applied to the data in a way that helps to better understand participant accounts. In many ways, communities are shown to have a complex and accurate understanding of sexual offences as serious and deeply harmful, but the data also suggests that the effects of fear, stigma, and unaddressed trauma can limit communities’ capacity to respond in ways that facilitate healing and reintegration.

Theme 1 established that community members have an awareness of sexual offences and understand their impact as profound and multi-level. Sexual offences are recognised to be deeply disruptive and have the potential to harm victims, break families, and destabilise community life. This theme provides an important backdrop for the following themes by introducing the social context in which reintegration is considered, and establishing the importance of trauma, stigma, and community safety in reintegration.

5.5.2 Theme 2: Community reaction to reintegration

Theme 2 of this analysis reflects community members' responses to the reintegration and factors influencing their attitude to returnees. It was found that participants' responses to the reintegration of sexual offenders varied depending on the nature of the offence, the level of harm it has caused to them, and the risk of further offending. Many participants described sex offenders as being dangerous and untrustworthy even after they had served their sentence and undergone rehabilitation. As a result, they either strongly rejected their reintegration or were deeply concerned about the safety of the community members.

Participants had a difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that sex offenders had to reintegrate into the same community where the crime had been committed. In their view, when sex offenders return, the crime they had committed was painfully revived in the hearts and minds of the victim, her/his family members, and other community members. The offenders' presence in the community was thus described as a reminder of what happened, which made victims and others feel fear, pain, and humiliation all over again. Such a reaction was particularly high in cases involving children, who were consistently identified as the most vulnerable group. In these instances, participants questioned whether rehabilitation could really prevent the reoffending and indicated that they are concerned that completed sentences did not guarantee future safety.

At the same time, some participants shared ambivalent opinions. In their view, if an offender has finished his/her sentence and rehabilitation, s/he has a right to be reintegrated into the community. They believed that an offender could be rehabilitated

and be a changed person. They could even add value to the community by using their experience to teach others the lesson. However, even among those holding more positive views, their acceptance was often conditional and was accompanied by calls for stricter monitoring and supervision. This reflected persistent mistrust.

Theme 2 confirms that the overall response of community members to sex offender reintegration was to a great extent shaped by their fear, stigma, and general lack of trust in offenders and in the criminal justice system. Many participants described reintegrated sex offenders as dangerous and a threat to their lives, especially in cases where a child was a victim. They were also concerned about the lack of effective and close monitoring after an offender is released from the correctional institution. These responses, in turn, may result in labelling, further marginalisation of these individuals and, in extreme cases, even revenge and anger towards offenders and the justice system.

This theme resonates with the findings of Lekalakala and Rakubu (2025), who observe that the reintegration process continues to pose a major challenge in view of stigma, fear of reoffending and rejection by communities, which is further deepened by the lack of post-release facilities and social support systems. This indicates that participant's narratives on the reintegration of sex offenders are in line with the already existing studies on this subject. Theme 2 therefore demonstrates the key role that community members play in either facilitating or hindering the reintegration process.

5.5.3 Theme 3: Managing the reintegration process

Theme 3 is composed of major ideas which depict how the participants feel offenders should be reintegrated back into the community. During the interviews, the participants expressed that offenders who have paid for their crimes must be reintegrated in a careful, clear and closely monitored manner. A common statement among participants was that offenders should not be reintegrated alone into society, but that they be taken through specific and transparent processes, which are likely to protect the community while holding the offender accountable and supporting rehabilitation.

The interviews revealed that participants view accountability, rehabilitation, support and monitoring of released offenders as essential. The participants repeatedly said that offenders should be made to pay for what they have done to their victims. In this case, offenders were described as directly responsible for what they have done, as described in Theme 1. However, some participants also described accountability beyond punishment in more general terms such as “accepting responsibility” and “accepting to change”. These participants frequently included the terms “responsibility” and “acceptance” in their description of offender accountability. In the data, offender accountability was linked to completion of structured programmes and/or rehabilitation. In the same context, continuous monitoring and submission to procedures was described as both a manifestation of accountability and an effective mechanism to ensure community safety.

Rehabilitation was seen as a process which to some extent seemed to involve aspects such as psychological interventions, education and behavioural change, and participants also associated sexual offending with emotional, psychological and developmental issues that had not been addressed. This can be indirectly interpreted to mean that for effective rehabilitation to occur, there should be the inclusion of professional therapeutic support or psychological counselling. The narratives alluded to the view that when distress, trauma and difficulties went untreated there was a higher risk of reoffending, and this seemed to be the basis for the perceived need for specialised ongoing intervention. Rehabilitation was also seen as a means to protect the community as well as a necessary intervention to help offenders function more constructively in society.

Monitoring of released sexual offenders was another critical area which the participants expressed concern over. Participants expressed scepticism about the adequacy of post-release supervision. This indirectly displays a lack of confidence and trust in current existing systems that are supposed to ensure compliance and public safety. The absence of visible or communicated monitoring mechanisms contributed to these feelings of fear and mistrust. This seems to create resistance to reintegration. Even participants who supported the idea of second chances wanted clear reporting structures, and ongoing engagement with professionals such as social workers,

correctional officials, and community-based programmes, indicating their acceptance was conditional upon strict supervision.

Support was also emphasised by a participant as being critical, alongside issues of accountability and monitoring. In this case, the support referred to by most of these participants was group or community based. It is interesting to note that the participants who discussed support did not see it as ‘support’, but as a way to ensure that the offenders were accountable or would not have further opportunity to offend. It is also interesting to note that the participants who described support did not see it as support. Instead, many of these participants talked about support as being in the form of ensuring that offenders are not isolated but rather are in structured interactions with trained community volunteers.

The theme demonstrated that many of the participants expected the reintegration of sexual offenders to be a closely managed process, requiring coordination among various rehabilitation programmes, monitoring systems, and community structures. In this sense, reintegration of sexual offenders was expected not to be a single event, but a carefully planned process, which would take time and require constant and ongoing monitoring of risk, careful management and ethical concern for both offenders and their victims.

Participants' emphasis on accountability and structured monitoring aligns with the view of McAlinden (2016), who states that reintegration should be based on a "dialectical" balance between community protection and offender support through "visible" accountability and ongoing supervision. Community-based approaches like Circles of Support and Accountability (Clarke & Brown, 2017) demonstrate how structured involvement and oversight can foster accountability and reduce recidivism, addressing community fears and reintegration needs.

Theme 3 showed that for community members to accept the reintegration of released sexual offenders, there should be evidence of offender accountability, credible rehabilitation and effective monitoring. This does not mean that the participants were against the reintegration of sexual offenders, but it shows that reintegration, for it to be

acceptable, had to meet certain conditions, which the participants articulated. The conditions were that the reintegration should be conditional, closely managed and monitored with a special focus on offender responsibility, structured and therapeutic rehabilitation and closely knitted, structured community support.

5.5.4 Theme 4: Role of social workers in the reintegration process

Theme 4 explored how community members viewed the role of social workers in the reintegration of individuals convicted of sexual offences, including their responsibilities, expectations, and perceived functions in reintegration. In particular, this theme reveals community members' beliefs on how social workers should engage in the intersection of safety, accountability, victim protection, and the overall wellbeing of the community. The data show that social workers were perceived as holding a key responsibility for reintegration. Social workers were expected to assume a central coordinating role in the management of reintegration, the provision of services and accountability structures, and the facilitation of constructive relations between the offenders, the victims, their families, and the communities.

Participants' narratives accentuated that reintegration was not seen as a passive or automatic process that followed the release from incarceration. It was seen as a process that required structured professional intervention. It was indicated that social workers have a responsibility to actively manage reintegration through interventions that include assessment, monitoring, counselling, community engagement, and advocacy. In some participant responses, social workers were even specifically identified as the most important and best-placed professionals to understand both the psychosocial problems faced by offenders and to understand the fears, concerns, and expectations of community members.

In terms of specific issues raised, there was a clear emphasis on accountability and structure in the responses. Participants indicated that social workers should not only actively manage and facilitate reintegration but should also work to ensure that people who committed sexual offences are held accountable for their actions. This accountability should be incorporated into the reintegration process in the form of

programmes, psychological intervention, and continual follow-up by professional and community-based structures. Accountability was connected in participants' responses to the issue of rehabilitation. Acknowledgement of wrongdoing, participation in treatment and other programmes, and efforts towards behaviour change and restitution were generally described as preconditions for reintegration in some form.

At the same time, participants stated that social workers were also expected to be protective and supportive of both victims and the community. This included roles such as facilitating access to counselling, reducing fear and misinformation in communities, and generally working to ensure that community safety was not jeopardised by reintegration. Community education about reintegration processes, management of community concerns and anxieties, and the opening of dialogues were several other tasks for social workers which were raised in participants' responses. The ongoing impact of sexual offences on victims and their families was also indicated to require particular sensitivity from social workers.

The data also show that community members implicitly understood the ethical complexity of social work practice in this area. Social workers were presented as having a dual role of care and control, or of responsibility to the individual client and responsibility to the public. This dual role was reflected in the community members' insistence on careful monitoring, well-defined terms and conditions for reintegration, and firm professional oversight, as well as in therapeutic and supportive interventions. Thus, community members understood social workers to be acting in the dual and often competing interests of both the person with a history of sexual offending and the community as a whole.

These findings align with existing literature that shows that social workers play a key role in the reintegration of all offenders due to their specific training in psychosocial assessment and systems-based intervention, as well as due to their professional values and ethical practice (McAlinden, 2016; Richards et al., 2020). The literature further identifies that coordinated and multi-agency involvement of various professionals and services are essential for reintegration (Tuschick et al., 2024). Social workers play a critical role in building bridges between criminal justice systems, treatment services, and

community structures. Literature also suggests that programmes of structured support, clear and enforced accountability mechanisms, and regular monitoring by professionals lead to better reintegration outcomes (Burrell & Laskey, 2017; Dalwadi & Sharma, 2025). In this way, the data are aligned with the existing knowledge on this subject and support the idea that social workers play a critical role in the effective reintegration of people with a history of sexual offending.

Theme 4 demonstrated that community members viewed social workers as central to successful management of sex offender reintegration. They play an important role in balancing rehabilitation with public safety, providing accountability, supporting victims, and actively engaging communities throughout the process of reintegration. This theme also shows the complexity of social work practice in this area and the need for structured, ethically grounded, and systemically informed interventions. The data support the idea that social workers should work across individual, family, community, and institutional levels to support reintegration in a way that increases safety, responsibility, and stability.

5.6 ATTAINMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The chosen research study applied and adopted the interpretivism paradigm that resulted in facilitating the exploration of the community's perceptions of reintegrating sex offenders in society. It helped me to fully understand the participants' feelings about their points of view on reintegration. In this case, through the use of participant storylines, the interpretive quality of the paradigm helped me to understand and explore their different points of view in in a comprehensive manner.

The research question, goal and objectives for investigating community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community are respectively listed in Table 5-1:

Table 5-1 Research question, goal and objectives

Research question	***What are the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community?***
Research goal	• *To develop an in-depth understanding of the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community.* • *To formulate recommendations for social workers' support to communities in reintegration of sex offenders into the Mamelodi community.*
Research objectives	• *To explore, community perspectives on the reintegration of sex offenders.* • *To describe community perspectives on sex offenders being reintegrated into the community.* • *To formulate recommendations for social work support to communities in facilitating reintegration.*

5.6.1 Research question

The research question of this research set the framework, the procedure, and the requirements to guide the study. The research question for this research was formulated as follows:

What are the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community?

This research question is explored and addressed based on the study's goal and objectives, and the answers were explored in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this report. It can be concluded that the research question of this study was answered by the information obtained from the experiences of the participants, through their observations and storylines, as well as the detailed analysis and findings of each theme, subtheme and category in Chapter 4.

5.6.2 Goal of the study

The research goal of this study, as outlined in Chapter 1, was, **to develop an in-depth understanding of the community perspectives on sex offenders reintegrated into the community, and to formulate recommendations for social workers' support to**

communities in reintegration of sex offenders into the Mamelodi community. The goal and the conclusion on the attainment thereof are presented in Table 5-2 below.

Table 5-2 Attainment of research goal

RESEARCH GOAL	EXPLORATION PROCESS	CONCLUSIONS ON THE ATTAINMENT OF THE RESEARCH GOALS
To develop an in-depth understanding of the community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community. **+** **To proffer recommendations for social workers' support to communities in reintegration of sex offenders into the Mamelodi community.**	As such, the goal of the study was met in each chapter. **Chapter 1** sets the scene by contextualising the problem, purpose and goals of the study in the South African context. **Chapter 2** provided an extensive literature and theory review relevant to the research. The ecological and social work literature provided theoretical lenses through which reintegration was reframed. **Chapter 3** operationally laid the groundwork for reaching the goal in a qualitative, exploratory research design that included the most appropriate data collection and analysis methods for the in-depth exploration and understanding of community perspectives. **Chapter 4** consisted of the presentation and in-depth discussion of the empirical findings that unfolded community perceptions about reintegration, safety and wellbeing of victims, offender accountability, stigma, roles of social workers. **Chapter 5** provides recommendations for social work practice with offenders, victims, families and community.	The goal of the study was achieved by means of a thorough exploration and analysis of community perceptions regarding the reintegration of sex offenders. Recommendations for social work practice informed by evidence gathered during the study, to address the needs of the offender, victim, and their families and communities, were offered in light of the South African context.

5.6.3 Research objectives

The research objectives identified to be attained for achieving the research goal gave direction to this research. Table 5-3 unpacks the research objectives and the attainment thereof.

Table 5-3 Attainment of objectives

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	EXPLORATION PROCESS (METHODS, TIMELINES, AND LOCATIONS OR CONTEXT IN WHICH THE OBJECTIVES WERE INVESTIGATED	CONCLUSION ON THE ATTAINMENT OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
To explore the community perspectives on sex offender reintegration into the community.	**Chapter 1** was dedicated to introducing and providing the contextual and conceptual background to the study, establishing the justification and rationale for focusing on community perspectives. **Chapter 2** was dedicated to reviewing national and international literature related to the study, focusing on community attitudes, stigma, safety, and reintegration. In line with the study objective, this chapter was a step further in the exploration of these aspects, identifying the gaps and need to justify the qualitative in-depth study of community views. **Chapter 3** outlined the methods used in the study. The chapter contributed to operationalising the study objective by identifying the qualitative, exploratory approach, purposive sampling, and semi-structured interviews as methods to access community members' views in the context of their social environment.	The objective was met. The study used an exploratory qualitative design to provide detailed and in-depth descriptions about how community members make sense of, experience, and react to the reintegration of sex offenders. The findings were a wide variety of often mixed viewpoints influenced by safety, victims, stigma, accountability, treatment, and trust. The study fulfilled the objective by discussing literature,

	Chapter 4, with the thematic analysis of the interview data, addressed the study objective. Through the presentation and interpretation of participants' stories, the chapter provided an understanding of the community's thoughts, concerns, and expectations of sex offender reintegration.	methods, and offering in-depth theme analysis to provide a comprehensive look at community perspectives and add insight to social work practice, policy, and future studies.
To describe the community perspectives on sex offender reintegration into the community.	The integration of this objective can be seen throughout Chapters 1 to 4 of the study. **Chapter 1** - The problem statement was outlined here and the need to provide a written and descriptive account of the community perspective on reintegration was stated. **Chapter 2** - The review of literature presented here, which included research findings regarding the community's perceptions, stigma, fear and social responses to the reintegration of sex offenders, also assisted in meeting the descriptive objective. **Chapter 3** - Objective 3 was further operationalised here, outlining the qualitative descriptive study design, as well as the use of purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews that would be used to obtain a detailed account of the participants' thoughts and opinions in their natural settings. **Chapter 4** - This objective was achieved here with a rich description being provided of the participants' perspectives on reintegration, as they relate to the	The objective was accomplished, and the study presented a detailed and meaningful description of community views about reintegration of sex offenders. The participants' stories and the thematic analysis yielded, in addition to prevailing opinions about the topic, also unspoken concerns, expectations, and contextual factors that shaped those opinions. This means that the study, with its complexity and nuance, gave a voice to how

	problem statement, in a narrative form using themes, subthemes, categories and direct quotations.	communities make sense of reintegration.
To offer suggestions for social work practice regarding the community perspectives on sex offender reintegration into the community in South Africa.	The objective to provide suggestions for social work practice in relation to community perceptions of sex offender reintegration into the community in South Africa, was achieved in a cumulative and progressive manner. **Chapters 1 and 2** framed the context and theory of the study, including a discussion of the mandate of social work in South Africa, the policy context for social work practice and the current body of knowledge (academic debates) on sex offender reintegration and community responses. In **Chapter 3**, research rigour and trustworthiness were sought by using an exploratory qualitative design which collected rich data from within communities on matters that are of interest and of use to social work practice. In **Chapter 4**, data-driven findings were developed through the identification of recurring, lived experiences in the data on reintegration from community members that raised issues of practical challenges, expectations and gaps in reintegration. **Chapter 5**, as a continuation of Chapter 4 and in an effort to more directly, responded to the identified themes and subthemes, Recommendations are presented for social work practice that are grounded in the data and context of the study.	The objective is met by producing suggestions for practice (Chapter 5) which are derived from community views and consistent with the overarching social work responsibility of working towards safer, more inclusive and successful reintegration in South African communities.

5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due the study being qualitative in nature, it has the following inherent limitations and unavoidable constraints that need to be noted:

- The first is the number and the specific context of the participants. In this study, data were collected from a small group of community members from one geographical area. The findings are therefore context-specific and not generalisable to all communities in South Africa or to communities beyond South Africa. However, generalisability of the findings was not the intention or aim of the study.
- The second limitation is that data for this study was based on self-reported information from interviews. Responses may have been affected by interviewees' personal experiences, emotions, beliefs, or desire to present socially acceptable responses. Interviewees might have been affected by the sensitive and often stigmatised nature of sexual offending. As a result, interviewees may have shared or withheld some opinions in order to present socially acceptable views.
- Thirdly, only community perspectives were explored in this study, and at this time no views were shared by sexual offenders, victims, or practising social workers. Due to the strong explorative focus on researching a relative under researched topic, this was not the focus of this study that was by design and in alignment with the research aims focused on the community perspectives. It would be valuable to include these voices in a subsequent expanded study to obtain a fuller understanding of reintegration from a more diverse set of stakeholders.

In addition, certain limitations were set by the government and the university at the time (Dodds & Hess, 2021; Republic of South Africa, 2020), as the study was conducted within the context of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of these restrictions personal and physical contact between persons was prohibited to prevent COVID-19 contagiousness (Chakraborty, & Maity, 2021: Gamede, 2021:110). Hence data collection for the study was done over an online platform. This was to ensure the safety of the researcher and participants and to also enable the study to take place

during a time of restricted physical contact. Online interviewing, however, may have limited engagement between the researcher and participants, especially when it came to observing non-verbal cues, such as body language and other aspects of emotional expression. All of these factors may have influenced the quality and spontaneity of the data received, especially considering the sensitive nature of both the topic of sexual offending and sexual reintegration in the community. However, online data collection also enabled greater convenience and, in some cases, a greater sense of emotional safety for participants when discussing sensitive issues.

To ensure transparency and interpreting the findings within their proper context Identifying these limitations is essential.

5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Grounded in and emerging from the study's findings, recommendations are made for South African–aligned social work practice, social work policy, training and capacity building, and for future research to be conducted.

5.8.1 Recommendations for Social Work Practice

The following key recommendations are made for social work practice relating to sex offenders' reintegration into the community:

- It is recommended that social workers should assume a more visible and structured role in the reintegration of sex offenders back into communities. Social work practice must focus directly on community engagement and the facilitation of a dialogue between communities, victims' families, and key stakeholders to address community fears, misinformation, and stigmatisation in reintegration processes. This should include structured community meetings, awareness-raising sessions, and individual consultations with community members and can contribute to restore a sense of safety, trust, and shared responsibility in the reintegration process.
- Social workers must also strengthen post-release monitoring and support services. Working together with different stakeholders including correctional

services, probation officers, and other relevant NGOs, social workers should provide post-release support to and monitor people who are convicted of sexual offences with reintegrating back into communities. They should build clear accountability structures and provide regular follow-up sessions, and psychosocial support. Risk assessments should also form part of routine social worker tasks in this regard.

- Establishing and facilitation of offender support groups and community-based accountability programmes are recommended to support behavioural change, encourage responsibility, and promote safer reintegration outcomes.
- It is recommended that social workers also have the responsibility of ensuring that victims and victims' families are receiving specialist support, as reintegration processes can have the result of retriggering victims' and families' fear, anxiety and emotional trauma. This may involve face to face counselling as well as referral and advocacy to relevant support services.
- It is commended that the DCS, in collaboration with the Department of Social Development (DSD) and social workers, develop and implement a specialised reintegration programme for individuals convicted of sexual offences. The programme should be set within community-based social work practice. It should be guided by clear policy frameworks to make sure that it is consistent, enhances accountability, victim safety, and community involvement.

5.8.2 Recommendations for Social Work Policy and Procedures

The following recommendations and suggestions for social work policy policy and procedures are made, aimed at promoting specific actions or decisions about sex offenders' reintegration into the community are made:

- It is recommended that the DCS in collaboration with the DSD should develop clear, standardised, and national guidelines for the reintegration of people convicted of sexual offences. The guidelines should specifically detail the roles and responsibilities of social workers, community corrections, community leaders, and civil society in reintegration processes.

- These policy and procedure should also clearly mandate structured community involvement and participation, including community consultation and information-sharing before reintegration, while ensuring victims' confidentiality and safety. This would help to address misinformation, moral panic, and community resistance.
- Policy should also prioritise adequate resourcing of community-based social work services in terms of manageable caseloads, safe working conditions, and access to specialised social work and related services. Without these, meaningful reintegration and community safety cannot be achieved.
- National and provincial social development policies can strengthen community-based service infrastructure by expanding access to counselling and support services within existing facilities, such as community development centres and clinics.

5.8.3 Recommendations for Training and Capacity Building

The Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services, universities, and the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) should collaborate to provide specialised training, workshops, and continuous professional development programmes for social workers working with reintegration of sex offenders. Training may be offered in the form of short courses, in-service training programmes, workshops, seminars, and continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives focusing on rehabilitation, reintegration, trauma-informed practice, risk management, victim sensitivity, and community engagement:

- It is recommended that specific training programmes be developed for social workers in forensic and community correctional settings. Training should also cover the tensions between care and control in the post-release period, ethical decision-making and risk management as well as work with stigmatised offenders.
- In relation to the importance of community education as part of reintegration, social workers should be trained in the delivery of public education and

awareness programmes on sexual offending, rehabilitation and reintegration. Social workers should be trained to address fears, dispel myths and misconceptions about recidivism and promote informed and balanced community responses to reintegration.

- Interdisciplinary training is also recommended involving social workers, probation officers, community leaders, NGOs, traditional and community leaders and law enforcement officials to strengthen collaborative and coordinated responses at community level.
- Training programmes in the areas of risk assessment, ethical decision making, community engagement, and cultural competence could be considered for those social workers who are directly involved in offender reintegration. Special training should also be offered in working with victims, families and perpetrators, managing community emotional.

5.8.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Forthcoming research is vital to build upon existing knowledge, address limitations, and improve decision-making by analysing potential, plausible, and desirable outcomes to fill identified research gaps. Therefore, the following recommendations are made for future research relating to sex offenders and their reintegration into the community:

- It would be useful to also research circumstances, experiences and views of victims and families of victims' experiences of offender reintegration. Their voices were not the focus of this study but were key subthemes that emerged and were significant in relation to shaping community attitudes. Future research that includes their perspective is recommended.
- Research is recommended on social workers' experiences of managing reintegration with communities in South Africa, particularly in poorly resourced communities. This would highlight systemic challenges, ethical concerns, and support needs in practice.
- Longitudinal research is recommended to better understand how community attitudes towards reintegration change over time, especially where there are

more structured social work interventions and community engagement strategies in place.

- Comparative research between different South African communities (urban, peri-urban, and rural) would be valuable in building a broader evidence base and supporting context-sensitive models of reintegration.
- Lastly, it is recommended to assess the availability and effectiveness of social work services in communities, focussing on trauma counselling and support.

5.9 VALUE OF THE STUDY

The key value of this study for social work lies in its emphasis on, and inclusion of, community perceptions on sex offender reintegration within a South African context. This is important, because offender reintegration within South African communities, where high levels of sexual violence, historical mistrust in the criminal justice system, and the lack of support and monitoring structures post-release, presents social workers and other practitioners with unique ethical and practice challenges. By focusing on community perceptions of reintegration, the study helps to fill a gap in a field of study with major implications for community safety, victims, and community wellbeing. This is done by providing South African social workers with context-specific insight into the role of fear, mistrust, stigma and conditional acceptance in offender reintegration.

In so doing, the study also contributes towards a clearer understanding and description of the multilevel nature of reintegration in a South African context. It thus demonstrates that reintegration should not be seen solely as an offender-focused process, but as one which is also profoundly shaped by the experiences of victims, families and communities. In so doing, the study could potentially strengthen the social work profession's accountability to work simultaneously on individual, family, group and community levels, and as such help to justify community-based, preventative and restorative interventions within local communities in South Africa. The study's findings also demonstrate the need for social workers to find an ethical balance between care, accountability and community safety.

The study also has practical value, in that it highlights the lack of awareness, monitoring, coordination and support that is often a common feature of social workers' experiences of practice in South Africa. It thus adds an empirical basis to this and supports the development of locally relevant practice responses. By outlining the possible avenues for practice responses, such as community education, intersectoral collaboration with the DCS and civil society organisations, and the need for a more systematised post-release support programme, the study also contributes to the South African social work knowledge base that can be used to inform practice guidelines, training priorities and policy development, which aim to reduce recidivism and support victims, while promoting safer and more cohesive communities.

5.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Chapter Five integrated the findings of the study with the research aim, objectives, literature, and theoretical framework. The chapter synthesised the empirical findings generated from participants' perspectives regarding community understandings of sexual offences, community reactions to reintegration, expectations surrounding reintegration processes, and views on the role of social workers in supporting rehabilitation, accountability, victim support, and community safety.

The chapter further reflected on the study limitations and presented recommendations relating to social work practice, policy development, training, and future research within the South African context. Overall, the findings highlight the complexity of reintegrating sex offenders into communities, particularly within contexts characterised by stigma, fear, safety concerns, and conditional community acceptance. The study therefore emphasises the importance of collaborative, ethically informed, and community-oriented reintegration approaches.

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ADDENDA

ADDENDUM A: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MAMELODI TOWNSHIP

"Community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegrating into the community"

9/05/2020

Contact person's name _____

Contact person's building no. or room no_____

Contact person's Department _____

Contact person's telephone number and email address _____

Dear contact person

I, Bulela Ntlahla am doing research with Professor T.M. Calitz, a senior lecturer in the Department of Human Sciences towards a Masters degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community"

The aim of the study is to determine what the Community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community is.

Your Township has been selected because it has people who have been members of the community for a long time with many social experiences they can share in making the study fruitful and helpful.

The study will entail interviews, audio taping and publication at the end of the study

The benefits of this study are giving community members an opportunity to share their experiences and bring a positive change when it is published.

Potential risks are to be avoided at all costs. The anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of participants are guaranteed

Feedback procedure will entail the publication of the study

Yours sincerely

Signature of researcher _____

ADDENDUM B: RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT LETTER

THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SCIENCES

RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Hereby, I Bulela Ntlahla, ID number 8311180791082, in my personal capacity as a researcher, acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the

- Unisa Research Policy
- Unisa Ethics Policy
- Unisa IP Policy

And that I shall conform to and abide by these policy requirements

SIGNED: _____

Date: _____

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

ADDENDUM C: INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research study titled "Stories of older persons about their adjustment following relocation to residential facilities" has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me. I knowingly participate in the study and understand that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit to myself.

If circumstances develop during the course of the study that render my continued participation unsafe, my participation will be terminated by the investigator with immediate effect.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement. I agree to the recording of the interviews.

My consent is given on the basis that my name will not be publicly divulged.

Participant Name & Surname: ……... (please print)

Participant Signature: ……. Date: 2020/10/22

Researcher's Name & Surname:

Researcher's signature: ……. Date:

University of South Africa
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www.unisa.ac.za

ADDENDUM D: DEBRIEFER CV

Personal

Name	Buyelwa Ngcayiya
Gender	Female
Contact number	
Nationality	South African
Date of birth	
Professional affiliation	South African Council for Social Service
Professions (SACSSP) Practice number	
Driver's license	Yes
Languages	Xhosa, English, Zulu, Sotho

Profile – about

I am an ethical person. I get along with ease with people from diverse social backgrounds. I am a good listener, assertive, companionate, and helpful as well as results driven. I work with due diligence both as an individual and within a team. I am able to apply theoretical knowledge gained from my studies and work experience through working in various projects.

Work

1. Duration	Organization	Division
10 Sept. 2016-31 to March 2020	**Fishawellness Hospital Contract end**	**Counseling Unit**
Designation:	**Social Worker**	

- Conducting therapeutic counseling for Fishawellness patients (individual)
- Do family counseling per patients' needs
- Do follow up to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of process of healing gone through by an individual
- Assist patients in their process of lodging court documents e.g. pertaining to maintenance, DNA etc.

2. Duration	Organization	Division
Jan. – Oct. 2014	**St Barnabas Hospital**	**Social Work**
Designation:	**Social worker intern**	

- Initiate community programmes.

- Evaluate and monitor community Initiate social programmes to uplift the community.
- Involved in project awareness campaigns both in hospital and in the schools.

3. Duration	Organization	Division
Mar. 2005 – 2012	**Caltex Garage**	**Cashier**
Designation:	**Cashier**	

- Serve and ensures customer satisfaction.

Education:

Tertiary& high school:

Institution:	Course:	Period/Progress:
1. University of Pretoria	Employee Wellness	2017*Completed*
2. University of South Africa (UNISA)	Bachelor of Social Work	2014*Completed*
3. St Barths High School	Senior Certificate	1995*Completed*

Other

Behavioural competencies:

- Cope with pressure
- Organized & sociable
- Team-player
- Assertive
- Communication & research
- Report writing

Computer skills:

- Excel
- Outlook & internet
- PowerPoint
- Word

References:

Name	Company	Designation	Contact details	Email
Dr Sindiswa Qungani	Fishawellness Hospital	Dietician		
Ms Njemla	St Barnabas Hospital	Senior social worker		
Dr K. Bvuma	Fishawellness Hospital	General practitioner		

ADDENDUM F: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

DR J LOMBARD

RESEARCH REPORT CRITICAL READING, LANGUAGE & TECHNICAL EDITING

Cell: 078 116 8018
e-mail: berto@woodcarving.co.za
JoubertoLombard@outlook.com

136 Erich Mayer St
PRETORIA NORTH
0182

W127

EDITOR'S LETTER

EDITING OF THESIS: MS B NTLAHLA (S/NO 45909075)

This is to certify that I, Jouberto Lombard, have critically read and edited student Bulela Ntlahla's dissertation for the degree Master of Social Work (MA SW), at UNISA, titled:

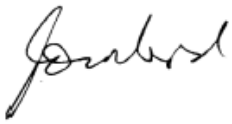
Community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community

Study leader: Prof TM Calitz

The following aspects of the dissertation were edited:

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Sentence structuring
- Logical sequencing
- Argumentation
- Presenting the dissertation as a holistic whole
- Format of the dissertation
- Numbering of sections
- Formatting of tables and chapters
- Use of acronyms and abbreviations
- Format of references

The responsibility to do the corrections and implement my comments and suggestions correctly, remains that of the student.



DR J LOMBARD
17 February 2026

ADDENDUM G: TURNITIN REPORT

Similarity Report

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ADDENDUM H: RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL

RISK ASSESSMENT

Complete the Research Ethics Risk Assessment by answering each question below. If you answer **"YES"** to any of the items, the outcome of the risk assessment is considered to vary from a low to high risk level. The UNISA research ethics review system is based on the UNISA Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Research Ethics Risk Assessment. If you are an external applicant, a copy of this document can be requested from urerc@unisa.ac.za; internal applicants can click on this link to obtain the document. If you are unsure about the meaning of any of these concepts, please consult your supervisor or project leader.

1	**Does your research include the direct involvement of any of the following groups of participants *(Refer to Section 4 in the SOP)***	**YES**	**NO**
Place an 'x' in box [if yes, provide details in the space allocated for comments]			
a) Children or young people under the age of 18 Include the parental consent letter and explain how assent will be obtained in section 6.1 of the application form.			×
b) Persons living with disabilities *(physical, mental and/or sensory)*[1]			X
c) Persons that might be considered vulnerable, thus finding it difficult to make independent and/or informed decisions for socio, economic, cultural, political and/or medical reasons *(such as the elderly, the dying, unconscious patients, prisoners, those in dependant relationships, women considered to be vulnerable due to pregnancy, victimisation, etc.)*			X
d) Communities that might be considered vulnerable, thus finding it difficult to make independent and informed decisions for socio, economic, cultural, political and/or medical reasons			×
e) UNISA employees, students or alumni Indicate that you will apply for permission at the UNISA Research Permission Subcommittee (RPCS) in section 3.1 of the application form to involve any of these participant groups in the proposed research.			×
f) Persons whose native language differs from the language used for the research Attach the translated data collection instrument(s), interview guide(s), participant information sheet and consent form in the participants' first			×

[1] 22q1 Describe whether and how proxy or gatekeeper consent will be obtained in section 6.1 relevant to items 2.1. a – e

language, as well as a letter from the language practitioner certifying the credibility of the translated material. The services of an interpreter may need to be secured for field work activities.		
g) There is a likelihood that a person or definable group will be identified during the research process and it is likely to be of concern.		×
h) Other[2]. Please describe.		
Comments:		

2	**Does your research involve any of the following types of activity that could potentially place the participants at risk of harm?**	**YES**	**NO**
Place an 'x' in the box provided [if yes, provide details in the space allocated for comments]			
a) Collection, use or disclosure of personal, identifiable information without the consent of the individual or institution that is in possession of the required information (with the exception of aggregated data or data from official databases in the public domain)			×
b) Collection, use or disclosure of personal, identifiable information directly from participants with consent		×	
c) Personal, identifiable information to be collected about individuals from available records (e.g. employee records, student records, medical records, etc.) and/or archives			×
d) Participants being exposed to questions which may be experienced as stressful or upsetting, or to procedures which may have unpleasant or harmful side effects		×	
e) Participants being required to commit an act which might diminish self-respect or cause them to experience shame, embarrassment, or regret			×
f) Any form of deception of participants, concealment or covert observation			×
g) Examining potentially sensitive or contentious issues that could cause harm to the participants		×	
h) Research which may be prejudicial to participants			×

[2] Form 1 does not apply to plant, molecular or cell research, animal and environmentally related research.

i) Research which may intrude on the rights of third parties or people not directly involved		×
j) Audio-visual recordings of participants which may be of a sensitive or compromising nature (with or without consent)		×
k) Disclosure of the findings of the research could place participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, professional or personal relationships		×
l) Any form of physically invasive diagnostic, therapeutic or medical procedure such as blood collection, an exercise regime, body measurements or physical examination		×
m) *Psychological inventories / scales / tests		×
n) Other. Please describe		
Comments:		

Please add details on copyright issues related to standardised psychometric tests and registration at the HPSCA of test administrator if test administration is in South Africa or of an equivalent board if administration is non-South African.

3	**Does your research involve any activity that could potentially place the researcher(s) at risk of harm?**	**YES**	**NO**
a) There is a possible risk of physical threat, abuse or psychological trauma as a result of actual or threatened violence or the nature of what is disclosed during the interaction			×
b) There is a possible risk of being in a compromising situation, in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour			×
c) There is an increased exposure to risks in everyday life and social interactions, such as working with hazardous materials or sensitive information			×
Comments:			

4	**Does any of the following apply to your research project?**	**YES**	**NO**
Place an 'x' in the box provided [if yes, provide details in the space allocated for comments]			
a) Participants will be offered inducements or incentives to encourage their involvement in the research			×

b) Participants will incur financial obligations as a result of their participation in the research		×
c) The researcher(s) can anticipate financial gains from involvement in the research (i.e. contract research)		×
d) Any other potential conflict of interests, real or perceived, that could be seen as compromising the researcher(s) professional judgement in carrying out or reporting on the research		×
e) Research will make use of Unisa laboratories		×
f) Research will be funded by UNISA or by an external funding body that could compromise the integrity of the research project		×
Comments: If you selected any option above, please describe it in detail here.		

5	**Guided by the information above, classify your research project based on the anticipated degree of risk.** ***[The researcher completes this section. The ERC critically evaluates this benefit-risk analysis to protect participants' rights]*** *Place an 'x' in the box provided*

Category 1		**Category 2**		**Category 3**		**Category 4**	
Negligible		**Low risk**	*X*	**Medium risk**		**High risk**	
No to indirect human participant involvement. If you choose this option, stop completing this form and contact URERC@unisa.ac.za		Direct human participant involvement. The only foreseeable risk of harm is the potential for minor discomfort or inconvenience, thus research that would not pose a risk above the everyday norm.		Direct human participant involvement. Research that poses a risk above the everyday norm, including physical, psychological and social risks. Steps can be taken to minimise the likelihood of the event occurring.		Direct human participant involvement. A real or foreseeable risk of harm including physical, psychological and social risk which may lead to a serious adverse event if not managed responsibly.	
(a) Briefly justify your choice/classification							

Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, the emotions and feelings of participants can be triggered during and after their participation, which may cause participants to withdraw from the research study.

(b) In medium and high-risk research, indicate the potential benefits of the study for the research participants and/or other entities.

The potential benefits for conducting the research study include:

- *The research can assist in the positive reintegration of sex offenders into a community*
- *The research study can result in future studies being undertaken by researchers in the social work field.*

(c) In medium and high-risk research, indicate how the potential risks of harm will be mitigated by explaining the steps that will be taken to minimise the likelihood of the event occurring (e.g. referral for counselling, debriefing, etc.).

The research study can trigger unexpected emotional reactions from participants, as the researcher is investigating a subject that can be sensitive in nature. This may result in participants immediately withdrawing from the study. Steps that need be taken to avoid the likelihood of the event occurring is:

1. *Allow for pauses during the interview when participants get too emotional for the interviewer to execute the interview successfully.*
2. *If any prior interviews with a participant caused emotional trauma, the researcher will withdraw the participant from the study.*
3. *The researcher will refer the participant to a social worker for debriefing and further counselling sessions.*

There is a possibility that information regarding the research study conducted may spread due to participants sharing confidential information with other elderly residents in the facility. Steps that need be taken to avoid the likelihood of this event occurring is as follows:

1. *Participants need to sign a confidentiality clause which specifies withdrawal if any information is shared outside of the interview.*
2. *Depending on the type of information shared, the researcher will determine whether the facility needs to be dismissed from the study.*

ADDENDUM I: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE/ QUESTIONNAIRE

Student: Bulela Ntlahla

Student Number: 45909075

Topic: Community perspectives on sex offenders' reintegration into the community

Supervisor: Professor T M Calitz

Below is the list of the biographical and data collection questions constituting the interview guide.

The participant would be invited to respond to these questions either by way of an essay writing exercise and/or a face-to-face interview**.**

Biographical and topical questions for data collection purposes

- How old are you?
- Where do you reside?
- For how many years have you been residing there?
- What is your preferred language for communication?
- What is your highest qualification?

Topical questions

- What do you understand about sexual violence?
- How does sexual violence affect your community?
- According to you, how do community members react or respond towards sex offenders returning to the community after having served their sentences?
- What perceptions do you have about sex offenders returning to the community after serving their sentence?
- By whom should the occurrence of sexual violence be managed?
- How does the community react when sex offenders are arrested?
- What do you understand as the reintegration of offenders?
- What is your view on reintegration of sexual offenders within your community
- How do you think can social workers support the community members in this regard