



**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE PRIVATE PRACTICE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
PRACTITIONERS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

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Declaration

I, **KATLEGO KUNGWANE**, student number **58054928**, declare that this dissertation titled, **“The impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners: A phenomenological hermeneutic perspective”** is my original work.

The sources that I consulted have been referenced and accredited accordingly to the original author(s). The APA 7th Edition was used as the reference style in this dissertation.

The ethical clearance to conduct the research was obtained from the University of South Africa, under the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

I declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality-checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

KATLEGO KUNGWANE

20 FEBRUARY 2024

Acknowledgements

With tears in my eyes and a constant state of fatigue, I did it! Through it all, I made it.

To my husband, Lucky Skosana, thank you for your sacrifice, love, support and guidance during this period.

To my cubs (Opeloentle and Langelihle), do you want it hard enough? You are more than capable. It is never easy, but it is always worth it. Be inspired, my younglings.

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Abstract

The research titled "The Impact of COVID-19 on the Private Practice of Psychological Practitioners: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Perspective", is a comprehensive study examining the profound effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on psychological practitioners in private practice. This research adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to deeply explore the experiences of practitioners during the pandemic. Ten psychological practitioners registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa were purposefully selected and virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted. An interpretative phenomenological approach was used to analyse the interview data.

The study revealed the challenges faced by the practitioners as a result of the pandemic, impacting on their economic and operational stability. Findings also highlight the resilience and innovative strategies employed to navigate the unprecedented changes brought about by COVID-19. This research is significant in the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology. The study goes beyond documenting challenges; it fosters a culture of innovation and sustainability within the psychological practice domain. By showcasing how the psychological community evolved and thrived in the face of adversity, it sets a precedent for future crisis management. This research thus acts as a cornerstone for addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by the pandemic and offers a forward-thinking perspective on the future preparedness of the psychological community and small and medium sized enterprises in the event of similar crises. In essence, it serves as a guiding light towards resilience, adaptability, and innovation within the broader business community.

Key Words: COVID-19 impact, pandemic, resilience, coping, adaptability, crisis management, psychological practitioners, private practice, hermeneutic phenomenology, interpretative phenomenological analysis

Tshobokanyo

Patlisiso e e bidiwang "The Impact of COVID-19 on the Private Practice of Psychological Practitioners: Molebo wa go leba dilo le go tthaloganya ditiragalo go ya ka maitemogelo", ke thutopatlisiso e e tseneletseng e e sekasekang ditlamorago tse di masisi tsa leroborobo la COVID-19 mo dingakeng tsa malwetse a tthaloganyo tse di dirang mo dikantorong tsa poraefete. Patlisiso e e ne ya dirisa mokgwa wa go tthalosa dilo ka tsela e e tseneletseng go batlisisa maitemogelo a baitse ka nako ya leroborobo leno. Baithutatthaloganyo ba le lesome tse di kwadisitsweng le Health Professions Council ya Aforika Borwa di ne tsa tthophiwa ka maikaelelo mme go ne ga dirwa dipotsotherisano tse di rulagantsweng ka tsela e e seng ya mmatota. Go dirisitswe mokgwa wa go tthalosa dilo go sekaseka dinewana tsa dipotsotherisano.

Patlisiso e senotse dikgwetlho tse di neng di le teng mo go ba ba dirang tiro eno ka ntlha ya leroborobo leno, tse di amileng ikonomi ya bone le go tthomama ga tiro ya bone. Diphitlhelelo di bontsha gape gore go na le ditsela tse dintšha tsa go lepalepana le diphetogo tse di iseng di ke di nne gone tse di bakilweng ke COVID-19. Patlisiso eno e botlhokwa thata mo lephateng la Industrial le Organizational Psychology. Patlisiso eno ga e felele fela ka go kwala ka dikgwetlho; e rotloetsa mokgwa wa tirisosesha ya dilo le go dira dilo ka tsela e e tlaa dirang gore go nne le tirisano mmogo mo lephateng la baithutatthaloganyo. Ka go bontsha kafa setlhopha sa baithutatthaloganyo se ileng sa gola le go atlega ka teng fa se lebane le mathata, se tthoma sekao sa kafa go ka rarabololwang mathata ka teng mo isagweng. Patlisiso e, e dira jaaka motheo wa go samagana le dikgwetlho tse di farologaneng tse di tlisitsweng ke leroborobo le go neela ponelopele e e bonelang pele ka ga go ipaakanyetsa isagwe ga setšhaba sa baithutatthaloganyo le dikgwebo tse dinnye le tse di mo magareng fa go ka nna le mathata a a tshwanang le ano. Tota e bile, e thusa go kaela batho gore ba nne le bokgoni jwa go itshokelana le maemo, go kgona go fetofetoga le maemo le go dira dilo tse ditšha mo go tsa kgwebo.

Mafoko a botlhokwa: ditlamorago tsa COVID-19, leroborobo, bokgoni jwa go itshokelana le maemo, lepalepana, go kgona go fetoga le maemo, bolaodi jwa mathata, baithutatthaloganyo, kantoro ya poraefete, Molebo wa go leba dilo le go tthaloganya ditiragalo go ya ka maitemogelo, tshekatsheko ya dilo ka tsela e di diregang ka yone.

Opsomming

Die navorsing getiteld “Die impak van COVID-19 op die private praktyk van sielkundige praktisyns: ‘n Hermeneutiese fenomenologiese perspektief” (The Impact of COVID-19 on the Private Practice of Psychological Practitioners: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Perspective), is ‘n omvattende studie wat die diepgaande effek van die COVID-19 pandemie op sielkundige praktisyns in private praktyk ondersoek het. Die navorsing het ‘n hermeneutiese fenomenologiese benadering gebruik om die ervarings van praktisyns gedurende die pandemie in diepte te ondersoek. Tien sielkundige praktisyns wat by die Suid-Afrikaanse Raad vir Gesondheidsberoep (HPCSA) geregistreer is, is doelbewus geselekteer en virtuele semi-gestruktureerde onderhoudsdata is met hulle gevoer. ‘n Interpretatiewe fenomenologiese benadering is gebruik om die onderhoudsdata te analiseer.

Die studie het aan die uitdagings wat die praktisyns in die gesig gestaar het as gevolg van die pandemie, en wat ‘n impak op hulle ekonomiese en operasionele stabiliteit gehad het, aan die lig gebring. Bevindinge het ook die veerkragtigheid en innoverende strategieë wat gebruik is om die ongekende veranderings wat deur COVID-19 veroorsaak is, die hoof te bied, uitgelig. Hierdie navorsing is betekenisvol vir die veld van Bedryfs- en Organisasionele Sielkunde. Die studie gaan verder as om net uitdagings te dokumenteer; dit kweek ook ‘n kultuur van innovering en volhoubaarheid binne die domein van die sielkundige praktyk. Deur te toon hoe die sielkundige gemeenskap ontwikkel en floreer het in omstandighede van teëspoed, skep ‘n presedent vir toekomstige krisisbestuur. Hierdie navorsing dien dus as ‘n hoeksteen om die veelsydige uitdagings wat deur die pandemie gestel is, aan te spreek, en bied ‘n toekomsgerigte perspektief op die toekomstige paraatheid van die sielkundige gemeenskap en klein en medium grootte ondernemings in die geval van soortgelyke krisisse. In wese dien dit as ‘n leidende lig na veerkragtigheid, aanpasbaarheid, en innovering binne die breër sakegemeenskap.

Sleutelwoorde: COVID-19 impak, pandemie, veerkragtigheid, hantering, aanpasbaarheid, krisisbestuur, sielkundige praktisyns, private praktyk, hermeneutiese fenomenologie, interpretatiewe fenomenologiese analise

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
APA	American Psychological Association
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics (USA)
BPS	British Psychological Society
ChatGPT	Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOP	Industrial and Organisational Psychology
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IT	Information Technology
MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
POS	Positive Organisational Scholarship
PP	Positive Psychology
PsySSA	Psychological Society of South Africa
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2
SIOPSA	Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa
SMEs	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
TERS	Temporary Employee Relief Scheme
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter 1: Scientific Orientation to Research

1.1 Introduction

This research focused on the impact of Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) on the private practice of psychological practitioners: A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. The aim was to explore the experiences of psychological practitioners to understand their views on the impact of COVID-19 on their private practice and how they rebuilt themselves in the new virtual world of work. It was a phenomenological study which adhered to the principles of such a method.

This chapter includes the background of the study, problem statement as well a detailed literature review that explored the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners. Research paradigms that the researcher identified are also discussed. Furthermore, the chosen research design is highlighted, as well as the details about sampling, collection of data, data analysis and ways to confirm quality and finally, ethics compliance. In concluding this chapter, a layout of this dissertation is included. The intention with this research study was to add to the existing knowledge base in the field of in Industrial Psychology by researching the perspectives of psychological practitioners with relation to the impact of COVID-19 on their private practice, which was an area that seemed to be not well researched.

1.2 Background to the research

The World Health Organization (WHO) classified COVID-19 as a global impact which had a negative effect on economies and communities because of how quickly it spread worldwide (Taşel, 2020). According to Thorgren and Williams (2020), the global crisis that occurred in recent months is nothing like what any generation has experienced. Iacopetta et al. (2022) report that the new SARS-CoV-2 variants that are emerging pose a threat to the health of the masses across the world and it creates COVID-19 surges worldwide. Arndt et al. (2020) state that COVID-19 has brought forth different challenges in South Africa. The government used lockdown, which breaks social and economic contacts, as a tool to reduce the spread of the virus. Such measures led to severe negative shock to the economy, which instantly caused a loss of economic activity, resulting in medium to long-term effects on the economy.

At a macro level, the coronavirus pandemic was the worst cause of recession since 1930 (Shen et al., 2020). Naseer et al. (2023) and Roy (2020) reports that the pandemic has caused disruptions in different economies. In Europe, they experienced a decline of 3.5% in their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the first quarter of 2020. Thorbecke (2020) states that the United States of America's (USA) economy was damaged by the virus, and Ahmad et al. (2020) report that China's GDP was expected to fall by 5.6% in 2020. The South African economy revealed a 5% decline in the country's GDP by the end of 2020. This would have been regarded as catastrophic months earlier; however, because of the impact of COVID-19, the decline looked optimistic (Arndt et al., 2020). The effects of COVID-19 are likely to be consistent with the GDP seen as 'slow' and 'long'. Many countries suffered bankruptcies and job losses because of the impact of the pandemic (Shen et al., 2020). Cutler (2022) notes that it has been two years since the pandemic started and the virus still has an impact on the health of people, as well as on the economy. The impact of the pandemic hit different industries differently, with some industries more affected than others. Many industries were affected in South Africa and some of these include those on the movement of goods, telecommunications sector, some mining activities because of limited demand for minerals, accommodation, and tourism because of the travel ban within the country and internationally, construction, transport and various services (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

Because of all these disruptions, the labour market experienced tremendous stress due to people having to stop working because of stay-at-home rules, non-essential businesses closing, health scares and less demand for goods and services (Şahin et al., 2020). According to Arndt et al. (2020), the attention should be placed on devising long-term strategies that will assist in addressing the health and economic effects brought by the pandemic. The British Psychological Society (BPS) (2020) states that from a professional perspective, there has been a considerable amount of focus on how different occupations were impacted by COVID-19. Different professional bodies and unions have been vocal about the experiences of their members. The BPS (2020, pp. 3-9) aimed to highlight the experiences of psychologists who are at the frontline of the pandemic and reported on the following impact of the pandemic on psychologists:

- Personal anxiety and uncertainty: The pandemic resulted in anxiety and ambiguity for many people. Psychologists may struggle to acknowledge the

impact the pandemic had on their personal lives because of the perception that psychologists should know how to cope with this, which in turn makes it difficult for them to speak up. There is also the fear for one's health and well-being, as well as for loved ones. Other psychologists were worried about their finances relating to job security.

- A lack of preparation: Psychologists were overwhelmed by information overload and were under pressure to act on a rapidly changing environment with no structure and process in place.
- Changes in the way of work face-to-face: Psychologists who continued with face-to-face sessions felt wearing masks affected their interaction and communication with clients. Some psychologist felt that there was not enough consideration about the validity of conducting some aspects of their work remotely, such as neuropsychological testing.
- Increased workload demands: There is an expectation of their capacity to quickly adjust to the transformation despite limited support with Information Technology (IT) systems.
- Ethical, moral, and professional dilemmas: Personal experience may impact on their capacity to support and empathise with others.
- Impacts on education, training and research: The shift to remote teaching has altered the university experience for psychology students, possibly restricting their involvement in diverse experiences, sport, and social interactions. While certain trainee psychologists were optimistic about the experience obtained during the pandemic, others raised apprehensions about how remote placements might compromise the overall quality and satisfaction of their training. Of particular concern were the limited opportunity to observe their supervisors directly and the lack of informal connections formed with colleagues.
- Impact on minorities: The pandemic's unequal impact on individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority communities, as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, resulted in intense feelings of sorrow by many psychologists. Some Black and Asian psychologists expressed difficulty in openly expressing their emotions and offering support to others affected by the pandemic's impact on their communities. Additionally, they were aware of the detrimental effects of poverty, including "digital poverty", which posed as a serious obstacle for

those who are disadvantaged, limiting their access to crucial information, education, and practical assistance.

- Furthermore, Wigdorowitz et al. (2021) indicate that psychometric assessments were not exempt from the effects of COVID-19. Although many assessments were conducted remotely, it had not been without challenges. As a result, South African psychology professionals who are officially enrolled with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and working with assessments had to postpone, stop, adapt, or move assessments to online platforms where possible. According to Wigdorowitz et al. (2021), the dilemmas faced include the following: Cognitive assessments need to be supervised by a psychological professional and the use of videoconferencing had been an option during COVID-19. However, there are other areas that the psychology professionals could not control which may impact on test-takers score.
- The psychologist ensures that the assessment room is conducive for testing, but with working from home, the logistical onus falls on the test-taker. They then become responsible for stable internet connectivity, a quiet room, electricity supply, data charges, self-paced completion, and distractions.
- Unsupervised assessments raised concerns about whether someone else could complete the assessment on behalf of the test-taker or whether the items were seen by people it was not intended for, such as a spouse or roommate.

Wigdorowitz et al. (2021) indicate that during this time, participation in psychometric assessments may be suitable and accessible to those with social and economic privileges. Furthermore, Pérez-Nebra et al. (2021) state that several published responses around COVID-19 suggested working from home, using virtual teamwork, leadership, and management. However, working from home and virtually is impossible for many people across the world and it only applies to a privileged minority.

Pérez-Nebra et al. (2021) report that the focus of research shifted significantly to study how COVID-19 had an impact on people worldwide. Research on the economic impact of COVID-19 was mostly on a macro-level, such as how different countries have been impacted, but not on a micro-level, such as an individual impact. According to Engidaw (2022), small businesses are at the cornerstone of the economy and as a result, they should be protected more than ever. From an emotional and psychological impact,

based on the above research, it was noted that psychologists were also affected by the pandemic. This research had a specific focus on how COVID-19 impacted on the private practice of psychological practitioners from an economic perspective.

1.3 Problem statement and motivation for the research

According to Su et al. (2021), COVID-19 has become a significant concern for the world population and economies. The unfortunate impact of the pandemic included the epidemic, economic crisis, and the natural disaster on various macro-economic factors. The virus brought numerous challenges and caused damage in every sector of the economy (Demertzis et al., 2020). From the afore-mentioned studies, it was noted that different industries and sectors have been impacted by the COVID-19. This includes self-employed businesses (Kartseva & Kuznetsova, 2020). Aczel et al. (2021) and Vyas and Butakhieo (2021) report that one of the changes that occurred because of the pandemic is the shift from working in the office to working from home. Even though it is not a new concept, COVID-19 has had a major influence in encouraging businesses to allow workers to perform their duties remotely to minimise contact and the spread of the virus (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). Stella et al. (2021) are of the view that investing in Information Communication Technology (ICT) for teleworking is a wise decision for businesses and individuals because it can assist in enhancing productivity. The use of digital resources is anticipated to increase for entrepreneurs and small businesses during and after the pandemic (Belitski et al., 2022). What was lacking in the literature was an investigation of the impact of COVID-19 on specific sectors and an understanding of how they were surviving during the pandemic.

Considering the above information, the formulated research question was as follows:

How does COVID-19 impact the private practice of psychological practitioners?

This study provides awareness and broadens understanding of the impact of COVID-19 and provides insight on how private practices are coping and remaining competitive to ensure sustainability. This research further added to the body of knowledge of Industrial Psychology and Human Resources about the impact on COVID-19 in private practice.

1.4 Research aims

The general aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners.

The study's specific literature aims were to:

- Conceptualise and understand COVID-19 as a construct in psychology.
- Understand the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners.
- Identify and conceptualise initiatives that psychological practitioners implemented to protract their private practice and to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Understand and conceptualise the resilience and coping of psychological practitioners in their private practices.

The specific empirical aims were to:

- Understand the operations of private practice of psychological practitioners before and after COVID-19.
- Explore the psychological practitioners' perspective of which private practice services were mostly affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Explore how psychological practitioners protracted their private practice to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Identify and formulate recommendations on resilient and coping strategies of psychological practitioners that can be implemented within their private practices for sustainability.

1.5 Literature review

The coronavirus outbreak severely affected economies globally, and the most affected were micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (Shafi et al., 2020). It is undisputable that small businesses, despite their size, funding, or geographical area, have been impacted by the pandemic (Engidaw, 2022). The research study sought to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners as such practices are typically small businesses in the service sector. According to Singh et al. (2024), the novel coronavirus began in December 2019, in Wuhan, China, and it made

its presence felt globally since then (Chehal et al., 2021). Ciotti et al. (2020, p. 365) report the following:

... inoculation of respiratory samples into human airway epithelial cells, Vero E6 and Huh7 cell lines, led to the isolation of a novel respiratory virus whose genome analysis showed it to be a novel coronavirus related to SARS-CoV, and therefore named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). SARS-CoV-2 is a betacoronavirus belonging to the subgenus Sarbecovirus.

In February 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic because it was seen as the first biological threat to modern society in the twenty-first century. On 28 February 2020, South Africa recorded the first infection of the virus and by 25 March 2020, the number had increased to 702 (Marivate & Combrink, 2020). On 15 June 2020, the WHO reported that there have been 7,823,289 reported cases of people who were infected with the virus worldwide and that 431,541 cases could not survive the virus. It had extended to over 200 nations and regions located on landmasses all over the world. When considering the number of death due to COVID-19, the outbreak may be regarded as the most significant global health crisis of the twenty-first century up to now (Schröder et al., 2021). COVID-19 is also one of the most notable pressures that has affected the entire world since World War II (Khalifa & Ramahi, 2024). On 20 February 2022, the WHO indicated that there have been over 422 million cases worldwide with over 5.8 million cases resulting in deaths (WHO, 2022a).

Kaushik and Guleria (2020) report that every country would be impacted negatively by the pandemic and the virus was likely to leave a permanent and long-lasting impact. To manage the spread of COVID-19, different countries introduced lockdown rules which unfortunately resulted in challenges. Different industries had to stop business activities, and this was likely to lead to millions of people losing their jobs. There is a great chance that these disruptions are likely to have long-term effects, which may lead to the shut-down of numerous businesses, and some businesses may take years to recover (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). As the pandemic persisted and we continued to experience deaths, the collapse of the economy, border restrictions and other related issues, the world after the pandemic will be different when compared to how we used to know it (Bieber, 2022).

1.5.1 The impact of COVID-19

According to Ahmad et al. (2020), Bartik et al. (2020) and Naseer et al. (2023), the coronavirus disease has caused a major economic impact. Fairlie (2020) reports that social distancing, health, and the shift in economic demands because of COVID-19 are likely to shutter many small and entrepreneurial businesses. According to the Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) Competitive Outlook (2020), the negative financial effects of the virus rapidly became apparent for SMEs. With employees forced to work remotely and supply chains disrupted by lockdowns, these small businesses that supply 70% of jobs and generate half of economic output globally, faced intense strain. The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) (2020) states that SMEs are recognised as vital contributors to equitable economic expansion and advancement in South Africa and globally.

Bartik et al. (2020) conducted research on the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses and found that about 43% of businesses experienced temporary closure due to the virus. These closures were because of a lack of demand and health concerns of employees. SME Competitive Outlook (2020) conducted research in 132 countries and found that the pandemic affected about 55% of the participants. About two-thirds of small businesses reported that they were strongly impacted by the pandemic and about one-fifth reported the risk of a permanent shut-down in three months. In Africa, about 66% of businesses stated that their operations negatively affected as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic, which diminished 75% of their sales and/or 54% challenges in obtaining inputs (SME Competitive Outlook, 2020). In South Africa, a 39% reduction in active employment in small, micro and medium enterprises was reported (NYDA, 2020).

About three-quarters of the businesses had enough financial resources to last them for about two months or less, and those firms with more cash had a positive perspective on their ability to remain open by the end of 2020 (Bartik et al., 2020). Small businesses often find themselves susceptible during an economic crisis due to factors such as not having enough resources to adapt to a changing environment (SME Competitive Outlook, 2020). In their study, Tkach and Kurpayanidi (2020)

compared the financial impact of COVID-19 between big and small businesses. They found that large businesses did not experience serious financial losses and will serve as the basis on which the country can rely to overcome the current situation. On the other hand, the most affected category is small businesses, especially those in the service industry. According to the NYDA (2020), the extent to which COVID-19 has hit companies is unknown and it may take months or years to determine its severity. While the magnitude is unclear, the decline in incomes, high unemployment rate and business closures are noticeable across the country. The impact has also been experienced by employees because of retrenchments and salary cuts. This shows the extent to which businesses were affected by the pandemic. This was further reported by Belitski et al. (2022), indicating the likely ramification on businesses as companies closing, fewer working hours, job reduction, disruptions in the supply chain, research and development processes put at risk, operations shut down, changes in how the business operate, losing primary clients, limitations in product or services, amongst other things.

Ertel (2021) links the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses to motivational needs through uncertain needs. Gambrel and Cianci (2003) state that the most referenced needs-based theory is that of Maslow. McLeod (2007) reports that the theory is mostly shown with hierarchical level within a pyramid, with needs lower down in the hierarchy needing to be satisfied before those that are higher up. The first level is the physiological needs that are the foundational needs, and they include the need for food, water, and shelter. Some of the basic needs may have been easy to attain prior to the pandemic; however, now they may struggle. If a person's needs are not being met because they are not receiving consistent pay from the employer, then loyalty to remain within a company reduces. Ertel (2021) notes that many businesses had to retrench their employees or reduce their working hours; however, if this can be avoidable through creative solutions, then the company will meet its workers' basic needs of their employees as well as the sustainability of the company. The second level of Maslow's hierarchy on needs is safety (Maslow, 1943), such as employment and health. Small business owners must be mindful of the negative impact they could face if they do not comply with health and safety regulations, as this may further decrease sales and employees. The third level is love and belonging (McLeod, 2007), and employees need to feel that they are part of a family and accepted by their peers.

The fourth level is esteem (McLeod, 2007), and from an organisational perspective, esteem needs are evident through a motivation for recognition, increased work responsibilities, high status, and recognition for one's contribution to the organisation. These needs are interconnected, and it is difficult to reach the esteem level if basic needs such as receiving a salary are not met. The last level is self-actualisation and during the time of COVID-19, people were less likely to focus on this need because they were mostly focusing job stability and health at home and work.

1.5.2 The impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners

Abrams (2020) indicates that industries that hire psychologists have experienced substantial job losses and cutbacks, as reported in the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) records at Georgetown University. Sammons et al. (2020) found that in America, the pandemic had affected psychologists with a reported 59% decrease in their caseloads. Marra et al. (2020) also conducted a study on American psychologists in private practice and found that most of them had experienced a reduction in their workloads and pay. It was reported that 62% of the participants witnessed a shift to working completely remotely.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2020), some psychologists had to pause their psychological assessment services due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while others had to continue due to its urgent and high-stake nature. In May 2020, the largest healthcare system in the US retrenched about 1,200 employees which included a group of psychologists. Brunier and Drysdale (2020) state that critical mental health services were disrupted in about 93% countries worldwide due to the pandemic. They report that different countries reported on the following services that were affected negatively: Above 60% indicated interruptions to mental health care for vulnerable groups, which include 72% of minors, 70% of grown-ups and 61% of females requiring prenatal or postpartum services; about 67% interruptions in counselling and therapy; over 35% disruptions in emergency interventions, including those suffering from severe withdrawal syndromes from substance use; about 30% interruptions in accessing pharmaceutical treatments for various disorders, and about three-quarter mentioned some disruptions in school and

organisational mental health support. Therefore, this showed the magnitude of the adverse consequences the pandemic had on psychological services. Moreover, Dowdeswell and Kriek (2020) report that COVID-19 had a negative impact on business operations, organisational performance and ways in which talent and assessment practices are approached. This is evident based on the findings reported above. Owing to the pandemic, a rapid move to tele-psychological services was identified and a large percentage of psychologists delivered their services using tele-psychology when compared to earlier in the pandemic (Sammons et al., 2020; Stepanova et al., 2024). Rees and Haythornthwaite (2004) refer to tele-psychology as psychological services being provided using technology. This included the use of videoconferencing which provides a live and two-way interaction using video-audio systems. Pierce et al. (2021) state that before the pandemic, clinical work conducted using tele-psychology was at 7.07%, and it increased 12-fold to 85.53% during the pandemic. Similarly, Raju et al. (2024) found that 84.8% of psychologists utilised telepsychology services during COVID-19 and 72.8% of those users regarding their experience as favourable and positive.

Sammons (2020) reports that tele-psychology is going to remain, and it is important for psychologists to increase their fluency in technology so that it can be extended to neuropsychological testing and other testing situations. Brunier and Drysdale (2020) note some disparities in the use of tele-psychology. They report that over 80% of high-income countries were able to use tele-psychological services to address mental health disparities in comparison to less than half of lower-income countries.

1.5.3 Psychological Practitioners

Psychological practitioners refer to registered psychologists and psychometrists. The Health Professions (Act No. 56 of 1974) provides the following description or scope of practice of the different psychological practitioners as reported by the HPCSA (2008):

Table 1.1*Psychological practitioners and scope of practice*

Psychological practitioners	Scope of practice
Educational Psychologist	Works in wide range of situations, acknowledging the significance of education in fostering growth and progress. They apply learning principles to cultivate competence within educational settings but also in various other life contexts. Their work involves collaborating with learners of all age groups and their families, as well as providing guidance to educators and other experts to enhance cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioural functioning as well as evaluate developmental needs and design educational environments to address and fulfil these diverse needs.
Clinical Psychologist	Provides holistic health care that addresses biological, psychological, and social aspects throughout one's life span; assessment, diagnosis, evaluation, and management of mild to severe and intricate psychological challenges and health disorders; and offers a variety of therapeutic interventions for managing mental, behavioural, cognitive and health disorders.
Counselling Psychologist	Promotes the overall welfare, personal development, social integration, educational progress, and career success of people, couples, families, teams, and communities; conducting psychological evaluations, diagnosis and formulating case assessments. Moreover, uses Additionally, intervenes with therapeutic approaches to avoid and ease various life

	difficulties, such as maladjustment problems, grief, trauma, psychological emergencies, and mental challenges.
Industrial Psychologist	Improves the conduct and effectiveness of individuals, teams, and companies to help people find purposeful and fulfilling employment by leveraging psychological tenets to evaluate, diagnose, and influence human behaviour, as well as facilitate the prosperity of a business through career advancement, management of organisational talent, coaching, hiring, training, organisational growth, ergonomics in the workplace and create, change management, business ethics, output, potential, behavioural economics, well-being, job-related stress control, and balancing work and home life.
Research Psychologist	Carries out scientific studies in psychology, designs assessment methods, such as psychometric tools, specifically tailored for use in South Africa, and enhances, appraises, and oversees psychological methodologies, conceptual frameworks, regulation, and practical applications.
Psychometrist	Administers, scores, and interprets psychological assessments across various settings, report writing and giving feedback in line with the psychometric assessments conducted; and helping advance psychological assessments and procedures within South Africa.

1.6 My Evolving Interest in the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic was unexpected and as a result, there was little preparation for it. This has led to the closure of numerous economic activities to manage the virus and contain its spread. This was commendable as government leaders tried to protect the citizens from the spread of the virus while feasible solutions were discussed to contain the virus. However, on the other hand, this had meant a pause in economic activities which led to many businesses struggling to make ends meet due to the lockdown and restrictions implemented by the government. Thorgren and Williams (2020) report a concern about how the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ways government responded to it with interventions like lockdowns and social distancing, impacted on small and medium businesses.

Personally, having worked in an SME for over four years, my retrenchment in 2020 was because of lockdown rules that put restrictions on business operations. This led to the company not generating enough income because it was not considered “essential”. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2001) defines essential services as “those the interruption of which would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population’.” Gaitens et al. (2021) add that essential services vary from country to country.

Posel et al. (2021) indicate that the COVID-19 led to a substantial rise in job loss across different countries. Like other countries, South Africa saw major increases in unemployment amidst the pandemic, and it was estimated that 2.2 to 2.8 million adults became jobless from February to April 2020 as a result of the lockdown and widespread halting of business operations across the economy (Posel et al., 2021). Most emerging nations saw a slow-paced job market recovery in 2022, and they continue to struggle with considerable unemployment (Yoganandham, 2023). Having been part of the statistics of those who lost their employment due to the pandemic with experience working with various psychological practitioners in private practices, elicited an interest to investigate how COVID-19 had affected them. It is important to note that psychology is broad and that while some services, like counselling and therapy, may be deemed essential, other services such as career guidance, mass recruitment and assessments may not be regarded as essential.

1.7 The Disciplinary Context

1.7.1 Industrial and Organisational Psychology

This study was carried out within the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP), and it offered useful insights and information for the sub-discipline of Positive Psychology. According to Landy and Conte (2016, p. 4), industrial psychology “can be defined as the application of psychological principles, theory, and research to the work setting”. Van Vuuren (2010) reports that Industrial Psychology is the study people's conduct, actions and interactions across all types of companies and workplaces. Macqueen and Machin (2022) view industrial, work, and organisational psychology as responsible for understanding the relationship between people and work. To provide contextual background, Spector (2021) indicates that IOP has its origins in the late 1800s and beginning of 1900s. The initial psychologists in the field were experimental psychologists who had an interest in implementing the emerging principles of psychology to address organisational challenges. Since then, notable developments and improvements in the field have become apparent (Salas et al., 2017). Spector (2021) states that industrial psychologists perform a variety of jobs working in different settings and that their main role is to improve organisational efficiency. Its effectiveness is demonstrated by the evidence-based principles applied in various areas of IOP, including selection, management of employee's performance, training, inspiration, leadership and team effort (Salas et al., 2017, p. 589). The aims of IOP were reported by Schreuder and Coetzee (2010) as to grow information and comprehension of the behaviour of employees in the workplace through research, as well as to utilise the knowledge gained to enhance the behaviour at work, working conditions, and the psychological well-being of employees. They also stated that IOP, along with its research scopes, has adapted to meet the evolving requirements of both communities and companies. It focuses on devising new information and technology, which can contend effectively with the evolving demands presented by changing global and national circumstances (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). Cascio (1995) believes that it is imperative for industrial psychologists to depart from conventional methods and engage in meticulous research to respond effectively to emerging trends. Therefore, by examining how the private practice of psychological practitioners have navigated these unprecedented circumstances, we gain valuable insights into the

application of IOP principles in real-world scenarios. In the next section the sub-discipline will be discussed.

1.7.2 Positive Psychology

Gable and Haidt (2005, p. 103) report that “positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions”. Additionally, Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi (2000) report that the focus of positive psychology is building optimal functioning in people, organisations, and communities. It is concerned with understanding the development of well-being, virtue, and resilience. These positive emotions are achieved by complex striving by means of thoughtful reflection on the positive and negative personal experiences (past and present), pursuing goals that are both meaningful and challenging, as well as an understanding of the environment in which one finds themselves (Davis & Asliturk, 2011). In addition to people being adaptable, Cheese (2016) reports that there are also many external risks for large and small organisations which enforce the need to build business resilience and adaptability to withstand unforeseen external disruptions and upheavals. Lomas et al. (2020) report that positive psychology has also broadened its scope to not only focus on individuals as the primary focus and locus of inquiry, but to include groups, organisations and broader systems as well as discovering different socio-cultural factors and processes that affect the well-being of others from a political and economic perspective.

Therefore, my research topic, which is the impact of COVID-19 the private practice of psychological practitioners: A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, drew on the above-mentioned phenomenon.

1.7.1.1 Psychological Paradigm

With regards to the psychological paradigms utilised to understand human behaviour, the following paradigms were applicable for this study:

Humanistic framework: Bland and DeRobertis (2020, p. 1) report that humanistic psychologists have the same vision of psychology “as a holistic, phenomenological exploration of the processes that organically promote psychological health and growth

in accordance with people's innate potentials". They also emphasise the self as the process of becoming. The main aim of humanistic psychology is the goal of a healthy person (Buhler, 1971). This resonated with me because we cannot live our lives in one place or in a static environment. We are continuously looking for opportunities to progress in life and reach higher potential. Therefore, understanding what psychological practitioners thought about the impact of COVID-19 was essential. This also assisted in building the second layer, which was an exploration of the interventions and initiatives used to remain competitive and sustainable.

1.7.1.2 Constructs, Meta-theoretical Concepts, and Models

The subsequent operational definitions were employed for the constructs that were explored and discussed in this research:

COVID-19: "The causative virus has been temporarily named as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the relevant infected disease has been named as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by the WHO respectively" (He et al., 2020, p. 719).

Impact of COVID-19 of the private practice of psychological practitioners: It is reported that psychologists in private practice experienced a reduction in their workloads and pay due to the pandemic (Marra et al., 2020).

Psychological practitioners: Include clinical psychologists, industrial psychologists, research psychologists, educational psychologists, counselling psychologists and psychometrists.

Below are the **meta-theoretical concepts** which were accepted on a meta level and therefore formed part of the research:

Coping: Is defined as "cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141).

Resilience: Is defined as a “phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiencing significant adversities or trauma” (Luthar et al., 2014, p. 126).

This research used the following **models and theories**:

Broaden-and-Build Model of Positive Emotions (broad-minded coping) by Fredrickson (2001).

Positive Organisational Scholarship by Cameron et al. (2003).

The Theoretical Model of Organisational Resilience by Xiao and Cao (2017).

In conclusion, the research hypothesis of this empirical study was based on the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners and the changes that came with it in the new virtual world of work. The workplace thus require adaptability in the event of rapid change to maintain competitiveness and sustainability.

1.7.2 Research paradigm

Hermeneutical phenomenology leads to the description and interpretation of the real-life encounters, acknowledging the significance of education, psychology, and sociology based on gathered experiential accounts (Guillen, 2019). It is a paradigm that seeks to explain the true form of things, the core and accuracy of the phenomena (Husserl, 1998, as cited by Guillen, 2019). According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), a paradigm is a fundamental system of beliefs and theoretical framework with assumptions rooted in ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Handriana and Dharmmesta (2013) state that the research paradigms include ontology, epistemology, and methodology. It is basically how we understand the realities of the world around us. In qualitative research, researchers (purists), also known as interpretivists or constructivists, are of the view that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed by participants (Tubey et al., 2015). Interpretivism and constructivism guide the reader into where to find a specific kind of inquiry (Schwandt,

1998). Their main goal is to grasp a comprehensive understanding of the complex world lived experiences from those who lived it (Schwandt, 1998).

Kemp and Vckovsky (1998) define **ontology** as a branch of metaphysics that is focused on nature and relations of being. Busse et al. (2015) report that there is no common definition of ontology, but the term means the science of being. It basically takes into consideration everything that exists. It asks questions like what is the form and nature of reality? Interpretivists hold the perspective that there exist multiple constructed realities instead of one reality (positivist), and that reality is a subjective experience (Levers, 2013). Creswell (2009) also indicates that people construct subjective meanings of their experiences, and these meanings are varying and abound, which prompts the researcher to prioritise the exploration of intricate perspectives rather than reducing meaning to a few limited categories or ideas. Therefore, my approach for this research assumed that people seek to gain knowledge of the environment in which they reside and work. My ontological stance was that there are multiple realities that need to be explored and every psychological practice had its own realities about how it has been impacted by COVID-19. The study explored their realities because there is more than one reality about how they have been affected. The aim was to explore their realities.

Epistemology was briefly explained as how we know (Tennis, 2008). Epistemology asks questions like what is the common belief about knowledge? The interpretivist/constructivist researcher views the world the way people construct, interpret, and experience it based on the interaction they have with others and the wider social system (Tubey et al., 2015). The researcher's role is to study real life situations as they unfold and the purpose of enquiry is to understand a particular phenomenon without having to generalise the findings to a population (Tubey et al., 2015). Untari (2016) states that the assumptions that promote the humanistic theory have related assumptions with the phenomenological epistemology. From an interpretive-constructivist orientation, Ponterotto (2005) indicates that the researcher and subjects both develop and build (co-construct) results and conclusions through their interactive conversations and interpretation. This aligns with this research because the aim was to engage with the participants to gain deeper insights of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners and co-

construct reality with the participants. As hermeneutic phenomenology allows for interpretation (Kafle, 2011), my research paradigm was well-aligned with my epistemological beliefs.

Rawnsley (1998) reports that **methodology** is about the procedures used that bring data that is believable. It basically pertains to the examination and thorough critique of data production methods. (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Like the ontological and epistemological perspective, the methodological approach also followed an interpretive and qualitative orientation. From an interpretivist/constructivist perspective, hermeneutically it shows an individual construction more precisely to compare and contrast it dialectically with the goal of reaching and generating a significant consensus (Dieronitou, 2014). Because the researcher and the participants' interaction need to be immersed over longer periods of time, a qualitative research method including detailed face-to-face interviews was conducted (Ponterotto, 2005).

1.8 Research design

According to Akhtar (2016, p. 68), research design “is the plan, structure, strategy and investigation concaved so as to obtain ensured to search question and control variance”. Research design is a blueprint of how the research is conducted. It is basically a plan that is proposed on how the research works. It bridges a gap between the research question and how the research is executed. Research is a process that has five stages, namely formulating the research inquiry, structuring the study methodology, gathering information, analysing information and report writing (Durrheim, 2006). This section covers the research methodology employed, along with the particular data gathering and evaluative procedures leveraged, in order to maintain complete consistency and flow between the research question, philosophical framework, and study structure, which ensured optimisation of the research findings.

This study was conducted using a qualitative research method. Qualitative research design is a methodology commonly employed by academics and investigators seeking to study human conduct, views, themes, and inspirations (Williams, 2019). The benefit of this research method is that it can “paint a picture” of a phenomenon that might not

be easily identified with a more dispassionate quantitative review (Williams, 2019). The research approach, strategy and method are discussed in the following sections.

1.8.1 Research approach

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach was applied within the interpretative-constructivism paradigm. According to Qutoshi (2018), phenomenology is not only about the approach of knowing, but it is a smart interaction of interpreting and trying to make meaning to understand the experience of others at a conscious level. The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, took an epistemological assumption that provided a meticulous and thorough descriptive investigation to examine the lived experiences of others (Moran, 2000), while Heidegger, a philosopher, took an ontological stance and rendered his ideas as a method of interpretation (Suddick et al., 2020). Neubauer et al. (2019) report that hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of qualitative research which is used to get a better understanding of the experience of others and more insights on the phenomenon.

Wilcke (2002) differentiates Heidegger (interpretative phenomenology) from Husserl (descriptive phenomenology) by explaining the former as preconceptions that are an essential part of the process in understanding and that people's experiences differ from person to person; the latter studies consciousness to gain knowledge of the work and that it encourages the process of bracketing. From a hermeneutic phenomenology, bracketing seemed almost impossible due to the significance placed during process of comprehension with interpretation itself being influenced by the historic background of individuals, and as a result, definitive interpretation is not always possible (Lavery, 2003). For this research, hermeneutic phenomenology was conducted to achieve a profound level of understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) describe hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology designed to yield detailed and descriptive narratives of people's lived encounters with specific events in their personal realities and narrations which tap into experiences common across all humanity. In essence, De Witt and Ploeg (2006) report that hermeneutics refers to the science of interpretation. The approach with this study was to explore the psychological practitioners' perspectives of the impact of COVID-19 on the private

practice. This was taken purely on their perspectives which are based on their lived experiences. It must be noted that my interpretation of data from this study may influence how meaning is constructed. Therefore, the necessary steps were taken to provide an explanation for actions and decisions taken while conducting this study. This was done to ensure transparency.

1.8.2 Research strategy

This study used virtual semi-structured in-depth interviews utilising hermeneutic phenomenology to comprehend and interpret the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners. Virtual semi-structured interviews served as the means of gathering information, with analysis of the responses performed via interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). According to Smith and Osborn (2015), IPA is a qualitative approach used to provide comprehensive information about a person's lived experience. Brocki and Wearden (2007, p. 87) indicate that it was formulated as a unique qualitative investigative approach in psychology, providing both a theoretical foundation and systematically-delineated instructions. In general, interpretive methods used in IPA align with the hermeneutic perspective which is focused on compassion and recollection of meaning (Smith, 2004).

1.8.3 Research method

Marais (2013) reports that the type of the study context, strategies for researcher introduction and definition of responsibilities, participant selection approaches, techniques for gathering information, protocols for documenting and evaluating findings, along with steps to safeguard high standards, ethical compliance, and effective communication of results, which are discussed in the sections that follow.

1.8.3.1 Research setting

According to Campbell et al. (2013), extensive semi-structured interviews form the core empirical component in many qualitative research conducted within the social sciences. The study utilised virtual semi-structured in-depth interviews on Microsoft (MS) Teams or Zoom as it assisted with adhering to COVID-19 regulations.

1.8.3.2 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

A psychological consulting practice was the gatekeeper and provided entry to the research setting. With regard to my responsibility as a researcher, Sanjari et al. (2014) indicate that during data gathering, investigators translate subjective experiences into textual narratives and then seek to comprehend the meaning behind those lived events based on the accounts captured, as well as categorising the themes in the stages to come.

1.8.3.3 Sampling

The proposed sample size was psychological practitioners in private practice and consisted of 10 participants. According to Lavery (2003), participants should be selected based on their lived experiences that align with the objectives of the study and should be different from one another to ensure the richness and uniqueness of stories of the experience. With regard to the participants for this study, purposeful sampling was used to sample participants strategically to ensure that they were familiar with and relevant to the research questions being asked (Maestriperi et al., 2019). Cases with rich information were used to acquire new knowledge or opportunity for further study. In this approach, participants were selected based on them being registered as psychological practitioners working in private practice. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2004) report that the IPA, which was used in this study, compliments purposive sampling because it assists in identifying a specific demographic to whom the research problem is applicable and holds personal meaning.

Should data saturation not be reached, snowball sampling would be used to get access to additional psychological practitioners in private practice. Data saturation is explained as a point where the researcher does not get new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024). Fusch and Ness (2015) also report that in a phenomenological study design, using probing questions and making a state of epoché will help with achieving a point of data saturation. Snowball sampling is defined as a process where a small group of selected individuals from a specific population are asked to identify others, and this continues, with the goal of acquiring a nonprobability sample or creating a framework for sampling (Handcock & Gile, 2015). Therefore, psychological practitioners were asked to refer other psychological

practitioners with whom they work to participate in the research, should a saturation point not be reached. The sample included psychological practitioners in various scopes of practice, namely industrial psychologists, educational psychologists, counselling psychologists, clinical psychologists, research psychologists and psychometrists.

1.8.3.4 Data collection methods

The following method used to collect data was virtual semi-structured in-depth interviews. Each interview took a minimum of 60 minutes. A non-directive approach using open-ended questions was used to make participants comfortable to encourage them to express their own thoughts and insights. From a phenomenological perspective, the researcher obtained sufficient information about the participants' experiences of the phenomenon by probing about their emotions, perceptions and understanding (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Furthermore, the order of the questions the researcher asked was led by the participant. However, a directive approach was taken where necessary, especially when more clarity was required.

The virtual semi-structured in-depth interviews were recorded via MS Teams or Zoom, and notes were also taken. Participants were informed of the recorded session and permission was requested. This method of collecting data offered the opportunity to engage and interpret the subjective experiences of psychological practitioners in private practice which supported the researcher's assumptions in ontology and epistemology.

1.8.3.5 Data management

All the participants were required to complete an on-line informed consent form as a prerequisite for them to take part in the study. It had information about the study, rights of the participants, how the data would be used, confidentiality as well as permission to record discussions and make notes. Lin (2009) states that data can be stored in different ways including hard copies, computer files or photocopies. The data received from this study were saved on the laptop. All the electronic documents are password-protected. The documents remained in a safe place for the duration of the study and soft copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive and cloud after five years.

1.8.3.6 Data analysis

The data gathered for this research were analysed using IPA. IPA is a qualitative method that is shaped by “symbolic interactionism”, focusing on how individuals construct meanings within their own worlds (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 17). Charlick et al. (2016) highlight that one of the significant theoretical principles of IPA originates from hermeneutics, and that it represents the discipline and practice of interpreting or discerning meaning (Tuffour, 2017, p. 3). Alase (2017) reports that the advantage of IPA is that the researcher gets the opportunity to experience the “lived experiences” of the respondents and it also allows the respondents to narrate their story the best way they see fit. The analytical process below, as reported by Larkin and Thompson (2012) and Howard et al. (2019), was followed:

- The participants’ texts were thoroughly analysed, using line-by-line coding of their reported experiences, concerns and understanding.
- Identification of emergent patterns and themes from their experiences. This was done per case and then across different cases.
- Dialogue engagement with the data that were coded and their psychological knowledge about the meaning behind the participant’s concerns.
- Noted a framework or pattern that illustrates the connections between themes.
- Organised available material in a way that facilitated tracking the coded information up to the analysis.
- Used collaborative methods for auditing, verifying, and refining a consistent interpretation, while also exploring reflexivity.
- Devised a narrative with detailed comments on data excerpts, guiding the reader through the interpretation process.
- Continuously examined personal views, ideas, and methodologies during the research, utilising a reflexive journal.

1.8.3.7 Reporting

The results obtained from this study, which included the interpretation and conclusion of data, formed part of a master’s dissertation of limited scope and was published in an article for research purposes. Kafle (2011) reports that in research, it is essential to be mindful of rhetoric which is referred as the style of writing or reporting of the

research work. As a result, reporting was done in a first-person reporting style for qualitative research. Hermeneutic phenomenology highlighted the key experiences of participants and necessitated a specific rhetoric that draws out their true intentions (Kafle, 2011).

1.8.3.8 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

The discussion in this section focuses on the strategies I employed to ensure quality research.

- **Credibility:** Korstjens and Moser (2018) refer to credibility as the trustworthiness of the research findings. To establish credibility, the researcher engaged with participants for long, triangulated and negative case analysis, and debriefed with other researchers, as well as checking in with to ensure credibility (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). Credibility encompasses the suitability of the research methods used in this study. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) state that using different ways to collect data makes our claims for fair dealings in illuminating phenomena using various perspectives strong. Following the interviews, participants were asked to validate the interpreted data to ensure that the information reflects their insights. Gray (2014) reports that the strategy of involving those researched to check the data and interpretation improves internal validity. In addition, peer reviews were also conducted, and a colleague reviewed the process followed in the data analysis.
- **Transferability:** Refers to the capability of applying qualitative research findings to various contexts or settings involving different participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This was achieved by providing a thorough and detailed theory discussion to ensure theoretical saturation and describing the research context in detail. Additionally, transferability can also be attained through a thorough depiction of the research context, aligning with research paradigms and selected research methods, along with participants' demographic profiles and theories pertinent to the study, to guarantee theoretical saturation.
- **Dependability:** Kemparaj and Chavan (2013) report that when conducting qualitative studies, dependability is similar to reliability, and it is referred to as data being stable over time and over conditions in qualitative studies. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) suggest the use of hermeneutic alertness, which aids

researchers in stepping back to contemplate the meanings of situations, rather than taking preconceptions and interpretations as they are without deeper examination or consideration. This was achieved by using an audit trail which is thorough analysis of the data and relevant supporting documents by an external person (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). Furthermore, an audit trail was compiled throughout the study, providing an explanation of the reasons behind the decisions taken in order to enhance dependability.

- **Confirmability:** Korstjens and Moser (2018) refer to confirmability as the extent to which the research can be confirmed by other research and that it is what the respondents said, instead of figments of the researcher's imagination. This was achieved by an audit trail, and self-reflection.

1.8.4 Research procedure and ethical considerations

The UNISA research ethics committee provided ethical approval. Research only commenced after such approval was obtained. The ethical consideration for this research encompassed securing informed consent, ensuring participation is voluntary, upholding privacy and confidentiality (Gajjar, 2013), and ensuring participants are not harmed. The information sheet and informed consent form (Appendix A) was provided to participants. This information was also communicated verbally to ensure that every participant understood the process and that their questions and/or concerns were attended to. Moreover, a written consent form was completed and signed electronically by all the participants.

Participation was voluntary and no-one was coerced or deceived into participating in the study. Participants were invited to the study, and they were informed that they were under no obligation to take part in the study and that they would not be penalised for choosing not to assist in the research. According to Bharathi et al. (2024) and Miller et al. (2015), the main aim of ethic consideration in research is to safeguard the rights and privacy of participants. The research should avoid causing any bodily and emotional harm to people participating in the study (Miller et al., 2015). Additionally, to ensure the confidentiality and security of data related to this research, data protection measures were implemented and a confidentiality agreement was signed by the transcriber. The research was conducted virtually with the participants by means of

virtual semi-structured interviews, due to the COVID-19 pandemic protocols. Therefore, the aim was to avoid causing any harm to the participants.

1.9 Limitations

This section highlights the limitations of this study and the recommendations for future research. Firstly, my experience working with a psychological practitioner in their business during COVID-19 shaped my research interests and selection of my current topic. This inherently introduced the potential for biases which could have influenced data analysis and emerging themes, even subconsciously. To manage this, it was imperative that the findings stemmed directly from the interview data itself and verbatim examples from participants were provided to ensure their voices were represented and findings co-constructed. As Kalu and Bwalya (2017) describe, biases enter research the moment a topic is chosen. Thus acknowledging biases through reflexivity is key (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023), which I achieved by continually evaluating my own role through reflective journaling. Self-awareness about one's biases is a vital first step, which should then spur proactive and sustained efforts to counteract those biases in order to adhere as closely as possible to factual evidence (Šimundić, 2013). Lastly, the results of this study cannot be generalised to the broader population because only a few participants were used. This is common with much qualitative research which is also the case with this study. A recommendation to improve the quality of this study would be to do a series of studies that focus on the business performance in the private practices of psychologists post COVID-19 and possibly compare the results. At this point, it is not permissible due to time constraints and size of the research population.

1.10 Chapter Layout

The chapter layout to report the findings in this Master's Dissertation Research is as follows:

Chapter 1: Scientific orientation to the research

Chapter 1 orientates the reader to the application of the scientific approach in the research by discussing the background, motivation, problem statement, research aims, research questions and research paradigms.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 aims to conceptualise the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners.

Chapter 3: Research article

Chapter 3 is the research article, as per the requirements for publication. The research article elaborates on the empirical study, research methodology and summarises the investigated sample and population. The data collection method is also described and the rationale for its selection for the study. Furthermore, how data are collected is described, as well as the presentation of the hypothesis. Chapter 3 ends with a summary that integrates the research results.

Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

The conclusion as deduced from the research aims is covered in Chapter 4. Further discussed herein are the limitations of the study and appropriate recommendations are proposed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 comprises the literature review and proposes to answer the specific literature aims of the study. Firstly, the different theoretical perspectives regarding positive psychology and humanistic psychology are discussed. Secondly, meta-theories and theoretical frameworks are discussed. Thirdly, the constructs COVID-19 as a global pandemic, work in private practice as a psychological practitioner, coping and resilience are discussed. A summary concludes this chapter.

2.2 Sub-disciplinary context: Positive Psychology

Following Seligman's interaction with his daughter, Nikki, he had an epiphany about nurturing strengths instead scolding her for her shortcomings (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Csikszentmihalyi (2002, in Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), recalls his experience during World War II in Europe where he witnessed the collapse of the world to which he had been accustomed. He reportedly witnessed adults who were prosperous and self-assured become disheartened once their livelihoods were removed. At the same time, others kept their integrity and goals despite the disruption surrounding them (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This had him thinking about what kind of strength these men and women were drawing from and, subsequently, realised the need for positive psychology. Gable and Haidt (2005, p. 103) explain positive psychology examines the factors and mechanisms that foster thriving, growth, or peak performance in individuals, communities, and organisations. Sheldon and King (2001) report that it is the scientific study of positive attributes and virtue. Similarly, Mayer and Vanderheiden (2020) report that the objective of the pioneers of the first wave of positive psychology (PP1.0) was to assess and analyse the positive capacities of human beings, focus on realising people's potential, and expand the perspective on concepts such as psychological wellness, joy, optimism, and well-being. In positive psychology, the concept of ocean waves was used as a metaphor to symbolise advancements in the field (Lomas et al., 2020). This is because the progression of the field is not viewed as a linear progression, but rather as a series of interconnected waves that have their own distinct characteristics while still being rooted in the same fundamental principles (Lomas et al., 2020). Seligman

(2002) states that the purpose of positive psychology is to bring about a transformation in psychology, from being preoccupied with fixing the bad aspects in life to constructing the desirable traits. The emphasis was to move from a disease model, where the focus is on people's flaws and weaknesses, their suffering because of harsh environments or bad genetics, and victimhood, to embracing strengths and what is good as another perspective to how psychology has been perceived for the more than six decades (Peterson, 2006).

The work of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) has not been without criticism as other researchers began to identify flaws in positive psychology. Van Zyl et al. (2023) report that reflecting on criticisms and critiques of a scientific discipline can be beneficial for promoting its growth and development. Such reflections can generate new opportunities that may improve the scientific value of the field, and potentially spark a wave of innovative ideas. Wong and Roy (2017) wonder if positive psychology is near its end due to excessive use for commercial purposes, particularly in coaching. They report that due to elitism, followers accepted everything being said which affected critical thinking during the peer review process (Wong & Roy, 2017). Miller (2008) reports that positive psychology rests on a foundation of flawed reasoning and invalid inferences that do not clearly explain terms and is based on unjustifiable generalisation. Additionally, mental health is associated with a certain personality profile that is lively, sociable, goal-oriented, and extraverted. Lomas and Ivztan (2015) note that critics of positive psychology reported concerns with focusing on positive psychological traits such as optimism, which can have a negative effect on someone's well-being, whilst seemingly negative traits such as anxiety may lead to desirable results. They are also of the view that such criticism led to the development of Positive Psychology's second wave (PP2.0).

In moving towards a balanced interactive positive psychology, namely the second wave of positive psychology (PP2.0), Wong (2011) reports a need for a new taxonomy which will assist in advancing PP1.0. The following three things will be achieved from the new taxonomy (Wong, 2011): Firstly, to bring order to contradicting information; secondly, integrate areas of research that were initially ignored by PP1.0; and thirdly, the heuristic value by focusing on various combinations of the 2 X 2 matrix. In the matrix, Wong (2011) reports on the four categories: Favourable Characteristics –

Favourable Results (Quadrant 1), Unfavourable Characteristics – Favourable Results (Quadrant 2), Favourable Characteristics – Unfavourable Results (Quadrant 3), and Unfavourable Characteristics – Unfavourable Results (Quadrant 4). Wong (2011) is of the view that PP1.0 mainly concentrates on Quadrant 1 and disregards Quadrants 2 and 3 which are beneficial to the field. Thus, in PP2.0, the best strategy to maximise Favourable – Favourable would be minimising Unfavourable – Unfavourable by identifying the benefits of Favourable – Unfavourable and Unfavourable – Favourable (Wong, 2011). Furthermore, the new taxonomy should consider the pros and cons of both the positives and negatives (Wong, 2011). The four pillars of PP2.0 were used to establish a theoretical framework for PP2.0. These pillars are virtue, life's meaning, resilience, and wellness. PP2.0 embraces a more nuanced and discerning perspective on the notions of positivity and negativity, demonstrating an understanding of the complex and paradoxical aspects of living a fulfilling life. It reflects an acknowledgment that well-being is inherently dialectical, containing opposing forces and tensions. (Lomas & Ivztan, 2015). They highlighted the dynamic nature of emotions and their role in human well-being, emphasising the significance of cultivating the complex interplay of positive and negative affective states to achieve optimal psychological functioning. Furthermore, Lomas et al. (2020) introduce a broadening towards complexity, third wave positive psychology (PP3.0). Wissing et al., (2022) report that the focus shifts from the individual to groups and systems where people are operating. The context also refers to nations, cultures, social and physical factors, life domains, life stages, and genders.

Lomas et al. (2020) expand on this and indicate that the focus on complexity contains broadening positive psychology's scope of investigation to include phenomena and processes that extend beyond just the individual level. It is adopting a more interdisciplinary approach by drawing from and integrating insights across diverse academic fields. Additionally, it is evolving to be more multicultural and globally-inclusive in its outlook and areas of study. Furthermore, positive psychology is embracing a wider array of methodologies that go beyond traditional empirical methods to incorporate other valid ways of acquiring knowledge and understanding human experiences. Lomas et al. (2020) indicate that the ways in which complexity is embraced in research may be seen as different kinds of epistemological "broadening", which is not only to expand the size or scope of research, but also to diversifying and

be open to new ideas without requiring them to conform to existing paradigms. They further classify this broadening into two categories, and these include expanding the scope of what can be known (such as in PP3.0) and expanding the methods by which we acquire knowledge. In essence, broadening in research involves both expanding what we know and how we know it. Van Zyl and Salanova (2022) state that this new wave will require a swift integration of technological advancements such as machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI). This will necessitate the use of more advanced models, methods and measures to explain intricate psychological phenomena. As such, collaboration with scientists, practitioners and the larger research community is required to ensure that the field continues to grow.

2.3 Psychological paradigm: Humanistic Psychology

Aanstoos (2003) reports that humanistic psychology emerged towards the end of the 20th century and most historians acknowledged its effect. Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow were at the forefront of this paradigm, and they were also presidents of the American Psychological Association (APA) (Aanstoos, 2003). The basis of humanistic psychology is that a client can be “authentic” without being judged (Ramey & Fleming, 2022). This stemmed from the realisation of how Freudian theory seemed dehumanising since it placed a lot of emphasis on negative emotions. McLeod (2020) states that humanistic psychology views a person as a whole being with their own uniqueness. It is a part of existential assumptions which state that people have a free will and that reaching one’s potential and self-actualising is essential.

2.4 Metatheories/Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Broaden-and-Build Model of Positive Emotions

According to Fredrickson (2001), the Broaden-and-Build model is a theoretical perspective under positive psychology. Fredrickson (2004) describes) Broaden-and-Build model as a subset of positive emotions such as happiness, appeal, satisfaction, and love serve to broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire. The underlying premise is that positive affective states expand people's mindsets and motivational spaces in that moment. For example, feelings of happiness spark the desire to play and be creative, curiosity prompts the drive to explore and investigate,

contentment fosters the inclination to savour experiences and integrate perspectives, while love engenders a recurring cycle nurturing all these impulses. Building on this theory, Sugawara and Sugie (2021) conducted research examining how positive emotions with varying levels of arousal influence thought-action repertoires. The aim of the research was to investigate whether the stimulation of varying points of positive feelings can expand thought–action repertoires as claimed by the Broaden-and-Build model. The students were split into three distinct groups through a random selection process: a) high arousal of positive feeling, b) low-arousal positive feelings, and c) neutral. This was done to test if inducing various states of arousal through emotions broadens thought-action repertoires. After the different groups viewed a 3-minute video, they completed an Affect Grip (a self-report scale that measures how a person is feeling) to compare their moods prior and post viewing the clip. Thereafter, the students filled in the Twenty Statements test to assess their thought-action repertoire. It was found that to a large extent, high-arousal positive emotion broadened thought-action surpassing low and neutral states (Sugawara & Sugie, 2021). As such, positive emotions tend to improve one’s thinking, and therefore build their personal and social resources (Fredrickson, 2000). To elicit positive affect and improve resilience, the broad-minded affective coping procedure was used and found to be useful in a study conducted by Panagioti et al. (2012). Fredrickson (2000) also reports that feelings of positivity produce optimal individual and organisational functioning. Employees who experience positive emotions can easily transfer that energy to other members of the group, therefore, improving group dynamics and ultimately the organisation. With the pandemic causing unprecedented disruptions and challenges for organisations, it is important to understand how positive emotions can help broaden the range of thought and action possibilities for psychological practitioners in private practice, enabling them to better cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19.

2.4.2 Positive Organisational Scholarship

Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) was pioneered by Cameron et al. in 2003. They offer a comparison between two kinds of organisations. The organisations are characterised by greed, self-centredness, a lack of transparency, and a focus on winning alone. Their employees tend to be anxious, obnoxious, fearful, fatigued, and feeling abused. Imagine if researchers recommend theories of solution orientation,

managing ambiguity, dealing with resistance, reaching profits, and competition amongst employees. On the other hand, other organisations are characterised by acknowledging, working well with others, virtue, vitality, and a sense of purpose. Employees in these organisations tend to be trustworthy, adaptable, wise, and have a positive outlook. Researchers emphasise theories of greatness, positive deviance, remarkable performance, and positive thinking (Cameron et al., 2003). Whilst the POS does not reject the first importance of the first-world view, it tends to place emphasis on the second-world view (Cameron et al., 2003). They posit that the first-world view mostly focuses on the negative aspects of an organisation such as worry, burnout, self-centredness, feelings of mistreatment and focus on individual winning, while the second-world view centres around positive factors of the business. James et al. (2020) report that the theory focuses on affirming positive constructs which include empathy and being grateful as means to foster business sustainability. Jain and Singh (2022) are of opinion that the POS process builds a better place by using scientific practices of prosperous businesses. The core principles and focus areas of POS are flourishing, profusion of resources, brilliance, resilience, and nurturing virtuous practices, will impact job performance (Jain & Singh, 2022). Preventing disaster and mishaps or managing challenges adeptly are integral aspects of POS. It infuses optimism amongst employees to perform in their roles.

2.4.3 The theoretical model of organisational resilience

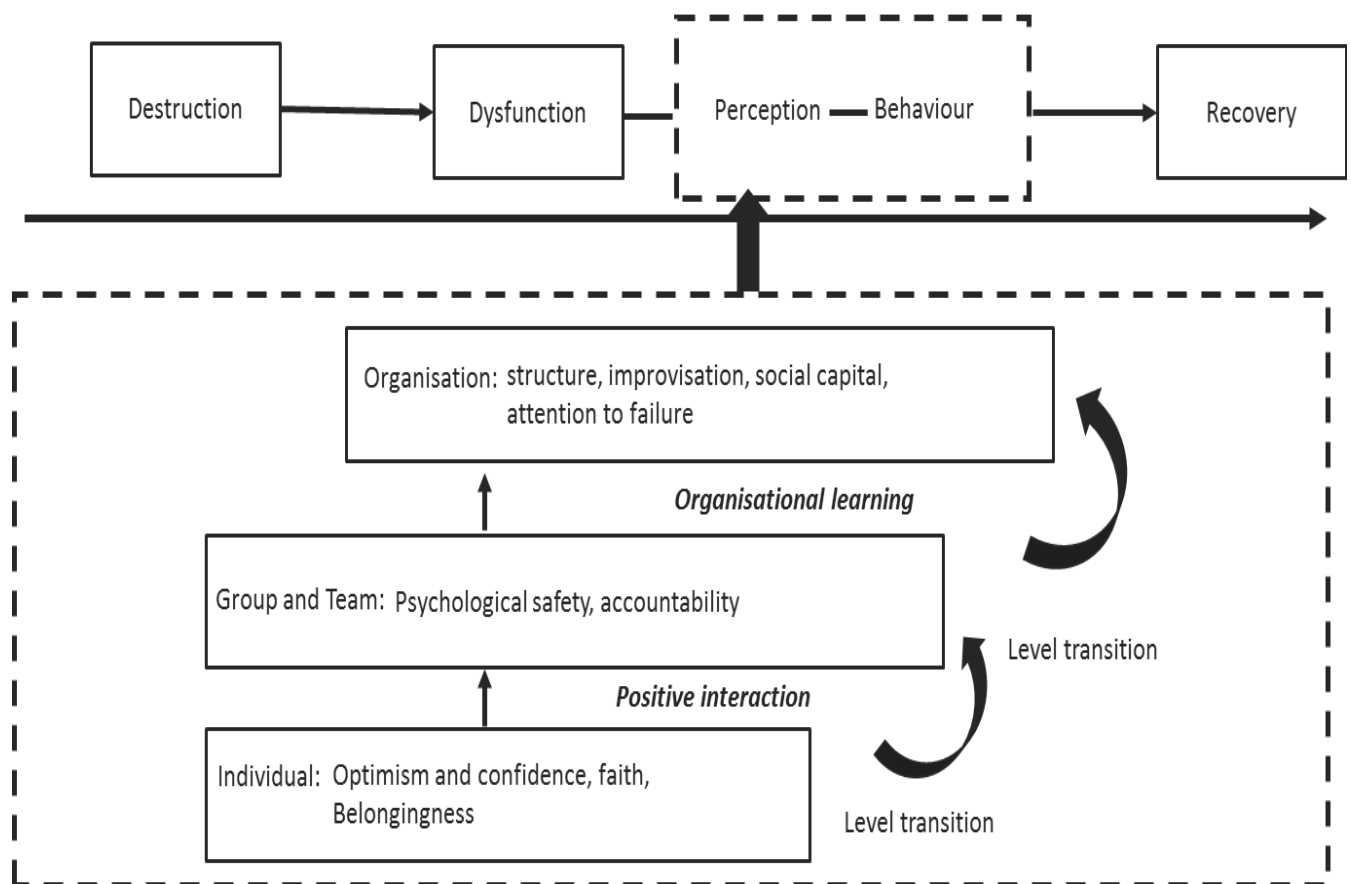
Xiao and Cao (2017) define organisational resilience as businesses capacity to return to its initial state or even acquire new abilities amid disruptive circumstances. The following characteristics of organisational resilience are stated (Xiao & Cao, 2017):

- Resilience is the potential capacity that can be seen when the organisation is undergoing a crisis rather than during the day-to-day activities of the business.
- Resilience is being able to snap back into shape when under disruptive conditions. It is the business's ability to recover after destruction instead of being resistant to an unexpected event.
- It includes engaging with members of the organisation at different levels and working on an individual, team, and organisational level.

Xiao and Cao (2017) considered the study of Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) in their theoretical model. According to Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011), resilient organisations succeed even when they experience shocking, continuously changing, and unstable conditions. As such, it becomes important to strategically equip essential roles with the necessary skills by creating competencies that will assist them to respond in a resilient way when faced with severe shocks at a business level. Organisational resilience goes beyond bouncing back from an adverse situation but rather thriving, capitalising on new opportunities, and creating a sustainable future (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Moreover, resilience had to be demonstrated in cognitive, behavioural, and context dimensions (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Cunha et al. (2013) viewed resilience from an individual, teams, and business level. As such, the studies of Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) and Cunha et al. (2013) led Xiao and Cao (2017) to construct a multi-level and factors model for organisational resilience, and it is depicted below:

Figure 2.1

Theoretical Model of Organisational Resilience (Xiao and Cao (2017, p. 3))



The above model depicts resilience at different organisational levels, such as individual, group and organisational levels. At an individual level, employees are expected to reinforce positivity for the organisation to be able to build and develop its resilience. At a group level, failures are seen as learning opportunities for growth. Lastly, at organisational level it is seen to create a structure that would adapt to business turbulences, improvising, social capital, and being attentive to failure.

The above model becomes essential as Yang et al. (2021) reported concerns that emerge about business resilience following the outbreak of the coronavirus. Barton et al. (2020) indicate that the need for resilience has never been more apparent. Sakurai and Chughtai (2020) report that daily practices and organisational processes have been cut and stopped, and as a result, they also affirmed the need for resilience. Considering the turbulent nature of companies, it is important to build the capability to exist in such an ever-changing environment (Cheng & Chen, 2024; Robb, 2000). Therefore, such models become crucial in building resilient businesses and positioning them to adapt to volatile work environments while remaining competitive.

2.5 Meta constructs

2.5.1 The global pandemic: COVID-19

Despite the looming shock worldwide, coronavirus disease 2019, called COVID-19, is not the first outbreak as there have been recurring epidemics since the 21st century (Hiscott et al., 2020). The first outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) occurred in 2003; the year 2009 witnessed the H1N1 influenza pandemic; in 2011 there was a MERS coronavirus; from 2014-16 there was Ebola and in 2016 Zika happened (Hiscott et al., 2020). These pandemics often have a negative economic impact, as evidenced by the H1N1 pandemic which resulted in an estimate of >\$2.3 billion or about 0.3% of the GDP being lost in the USA (Bell et al., 2009, as cited in Messmechar, 2009). On the other hand, the WHO (2009) stated it was challenging to predict the accurate human and socio-economic impact of the H1N1 pandemic; however, past experiences reveal that pandemics cause significant impacts in a short period of time. Goel et al. (2021) state that COVID-19 is the most serious pandemic of the 21st century. "COVID-19 is considered as the first real pandemic of the age of globalisation since it effectively combines certain underlying characteristics: global

scale, extremely fast speed of transmission, cross effects of global interterritorial interdependencies, interdependence of nations in the management of their respective epidemics and growing complexity in the spatial organisation of economic globalisation” (Jeanne et al., 2022, p. 1187).

According to Lone and Ahmad (2020, p. 1300), “the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), caused the highly contagious disease COVID-19”. In December 2019, the virus which was first reported in Wuhan has affected China and spread to other countries (Gong et al., 2020; He et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021; Mo et al., 2020). He et al. (2020) state that the COVID-19 epidemic has turned into a health threat worldwide. From 30 January 2020, the spread of the virus led to concerns globally, and on 11 March 2020, the WHO confirmed it a worldwide pandemic (WHO, 2020). At the time, there were 118,000 reported cases in 114 countries (WHO, 2020). As of 28 October 2022, the WHO has reported over 626 million confirmed COVID-19 cases globally (WHO, 2022c). This number is made up of over 260 million cases in Europe, over 179 million in the Americas, Western Pacific with more than 96 million, South-East Asia with over 60 million, Eastern Mediterranean has more than 23 million, and lastly, Africa with over 9 million confirmed cases (WHO, 2022c). Due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus across communities and its significant death toll, Greyling et al. (2020) report that governments introduced lockdown regulations to minimise the transmission of the virus, as well as social distancing (Verhoef et al., 2023). These measures were necessary to avoid the health care system from collapsing and reducing mortality rates (Aquino et al., 2020).

While some researchers saw the benefits of lockdown, others reported on its consequences. Herby et al. (2022, p. ii) define lockdown the mandatory implementation of at least one non-medical intervention measure aimed at controlling the spread of disease. Haider et al. (2020) define lockdown as a suite of universally-applied, compulsory actions intended to curb COVID-19 transmission, which disrupt established societal and economic norms through the imposition of restrictions. Moosa (2022) explains social distancing as a physical distance between people and that it includes various measures such as working remotely, minimising non-essential travelling, closing of schools and work and cancelling large events. Lau et al. (2020) are of the view that lockdown contains the spread of the virus and that previous

research on the outbreak of SARS, Ebola, and bubonic plague proved to be effective. The lack of measures to contain the virus would have led to more deaths due to limited beds in the hospitals, particularly in intensive care units (Gatti & Retali, 2021). On the contrary, Ozili and Arum (2022) state that the implementation of social distancing due to the virus resulted in investment markets, business offices, companies, and mass gatherings closing down. The rapid spread of the virus and the heightened ambiguity about the severity of the situation caused customers, investors, and international trade partners to prioritise their safety, leading to a shift towards a more cautious behaviour. A study by Herby et al. (2022) found little to no health benefits resulting from compulsory behavioural changes because of lockdowns. They conclude that lockdowns had little to no effect in minimising the mortality rate resulting from COVID-19. Onyeaka et al. (2021) state that the worldwide lockdown due to the coronavirus had more serious consequences in different aspects of life, such as inaccessible education for students, a lack of food security based on prices fluctuating, the downturn in global economic activity, high mental health issues, and an increase in challenges related to wellness and quality of life. The impact of the lockdown was even more significant in regions with lower mobility levels and a higher COVID-19 transmission (Jain & Kumar, 2023). Bashir et al. (2020) indicate that the pandemic has caused enormous global social and economic concerns. Different industries and businesses have experienced the impact of the pandemic (Du et al., 2022).

According to Chowdhury et al. (2021), different sectors had been affected by the pandemic and the most hit industry was tourism and hospitality. Due to restrictions on travelling and a lack of tourist attractions, airline companies had to shut down temporarily which resulted in more people losing their jobs (Chowdhury et al., 2021). It is reported that 90% of the industry's activity was cut short. Bashir et al. (2020) and Aharon et al. (2021) also corroborate the enormous hit that the travel industry experienced. The stock market also witnessed one of the worst declines since the financial crisis in 2008 (Bashir et al., 2020). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020) stated that the food and agriculture sector took a strain as it was difficult to transport food within and across borders. It is reported that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also suffered, and they may have been affected more than big organisation. They experienced financial loss, low sales, cash flow issues, inability to meet contractual obligations, and businesses closing during or

after a crisis (Alves et al., 2020). Moreover, they were less likely to adapt quickly to the changes in legislation and demand (Fairlie & Fossen, 2021). This led to limited employment opportunities and growth in GDP across different countries (Ma et al., 2021). Mawani et al. (2021) also indicate the loss of jobs as an issue, and in addition, report on poor working conditions, fewer working hours, and less salaries. Rudolph et al. (2021) report that at this point, it is too early to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 on psychological, socio-economic, and cultural factors.

2.5.2 Nature of work in the private practice of psychological practitioners

DeAngelis (2011) quotes the American Psychological Association's (APA) Centre for Workforce Studies which indicated that more than half of psychologists who offer health services work as independent practitioners. According to Cherry (2021), the type of work that psychological practitioners perform is vast and varies significantly from one practice to the other. DeAngelis (2011) reports that the work of practitioners can differ from offering therapy to patients, conducting workshops for school teachers on psychological and behavioural issues, to developing software that assists social service agencies in tracking clients, as well as offering educational content, forensic evaluations and business interventions. Overholser (2010) states that practitioners have to conduct in-contact sessions with their clients regularly and they also have to remain active in their practice.

Rosen and Weil (1996) conducted research on the use of technology by psychological practitioners in their private practices. Their study revealed that (a) close to three-quarters used computers in their private practice and most of them used slightly more than just Microsoft Word processing; (b) a quarter connected to online services via a modem; (c) three-quarters had a fax machine in their private practices; half made use of a pager, computerised voice messaging was used by out 10, fewer virtual assessments were conducted; and more than half described themselves as mildly to highly fearful or anxious about technological advancement. Whilst the use of telehealth is not a new concept (Stepanova et al., 2024) and can be dated as far back as the 1960s (Sammons et al., 2020), VandenBos and William (2000) report that only 2% used telephone or internet platforms to offer their services and they expected this number to increase in the future as technology becomes accessible and universal. In

2019, Pierce et al. (2020) found that only 21% of psychological practitioners used telepsychology in the USA.

Despite the low use of telepsychology prior to the pandemic, the practitioners had to transition to a new world of work following the outbreak of COVID-19 (Feijit et al., 2020; Stepanova et al., 2024). Alqahtani et al. (2021) indicate that this was due to the disruption of traditional face-to-face practices of psychological assessments and interventions because of the coronavirus pandemic. They had to move from mainly face-to-face consultations to online (Cerasa et al., 2022; Feijit et al., 2020; Sammons et al., 2020; Sampaio et al., 2021). During COVID-19, psychological practitioners in private practice working in India had to respond to their patients' emotional distress caused by the pandemic and lockdown (Kumar, 2020). As such, practitioners resorted to offering their services telephonically and they also used social media to reach out to their clientele and the public at large (Kumar, 2020). This shift of work, however, has not been without challenges, as reported by Kumar (2020). According to Kumar (2020), offering services through helplines, telephone, and video consultations resulted in the following (Kumar, 2020):

- Transitioning from working in an office to virtually was problematic for more professionals who were not technologically inclined.
- Working in a new environment such as a helpline or call centre made it difficult to pay attention to non-verbal communications such as body language, facial gestures, visual contact as well as challenges related to telephone networks where calls would drop during consultations.
- A lack of information related to the ethical and legislative adherences relating to conducting their services on an online platform.
- Resistance from clients/patients in embracing virtual sessions as they believed it was not worth the fee they were paying as the session lacked intimacy when compared to face-to-face consultations.
- Feelings of apprehension regarding the validity and reliability of psychological assessments conducted on and offline.
- Virtual consultations with children became challenging.
- Unqualified counsellors disrupt the market by offering online counselling for a fraction of the price that psychological practitioners charge in private practice.

Nevertheless, Kane et al. (2021) and Rudolph et al. (2021) also noted the opportunities that the pandemic presented. According to Kane et al. (2021), leaders would have to implement innovative interventions and come up with approaches that were likely to reinvent the workplace to ensure that it remains resilient through the different disruptions. Vyas (2022) reports that the interruption of the coronavirus led to the exploration of a flexible work environment. A hybrid environment where consideration is placed on work that can be performed remotely and collocated was reported as an option to be explored (Kane et al., 2021). As such, psychological practitioners incorporated telepsychology as their solution during the pandemic (Pierce et al., 2021). The APA (2013, p. 791) defines telepsychology as the “provision of psychological services using telecommunication technologies”. For ease of reference, the APA (2013) came up with telepsychology guidelines for psychological practitioners to adopt when conducting psychological interventions in their practices. These interventions may benefit the private practice of practitioners during the pandemic. Alqahtani et al. (2021) state that training may also be necessary to learn how to deal with psychological and physical clues in a virtual environment and subsequently improve effectiveness. According to Alqahtani et al. (2021), it is recommended to use telepsychology services to conduct psychometric assessments to assess mental health issues and offer support to patients, as well as developing therapeutic interventions such as internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy. Havlik et al. (2022) and Pappas (2023) reports that group sessions can also be facilitated online. In addition to recommending telepsychology, Sampaio et al. (2021) indicate that virtual reality is a tool that can be used in the private practice of psychological practitioners to obviate issues that are related to the pandemic. Furthermore, Sampaio et al. (2021) carried out a comparison investigation on the use of telepsychology between practitioners before and during the pandemic. It was reported that only 39% used telepsychology prior to the outbreak and 98% during the coronavirus. Therefore, the concept of the work has irreversibly shifted from pre-COVID-19 practices (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2020; Kaushik, 2020). Stoll et al. (2020) note the ethical considerations that are for online psychotherapy and those that are against it. The arguments that were pro telepsychology include:

- Psychotherapy is now more accessible, and there is greater availability and flexibility of services.
- Therapy advantages and improved communication.

- Benefits related to client characteristics, such as being located remotely.
- It is easily accessible, fulfilling, acceptable and in high demand.
- Economic benefits.

On the other hand, the ethical arguments that oppose online psychotherapy include:

- Concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and safety issues. According to APA (2013) and Serrano-Juárez et al. (2023), client information and privacy must be maintained.
- Skills of the practitioner and the need for specialised training using technology when operating online.
- Communication challenges resulting from technology.
- Insufficient reach on telepsychology.
- Emergency issues.

2.5.3 Coping

Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) define coping as the cognitive strategies and behavioural efforts employed to handle the internal and external demands presented by situations that are subjectively appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources. Williams (1985, p. 11) regards stress as a psychological and emotional state characterised by negative affective experiences such as “fear, frustration, anxiety, anger, uncertainty, pressure, conflict, tension, and emotional distress”. This state arises from the presence of one or more circumstances (stressors) that the individual perceives as posing a potential threat to their overall well-being.

Aschbacher et al. (2013) note that stress is not always harmful as it may have some benefits such as enhanced performance and resilience. Whilst stress is not entirely negative, it becomes an issue once it surpasses a manageable threshold (Vasumathi et al., 2003). It may cause physical and psychological issues over time, which is why coping is important (Khosla, 2006). In this regard, Babore et al. (2020) point out that past studies reported on the connection between stress and coping strategies. These include Baqutayan (2015), who states that stress can impact negatively on a person's performance and efficiency, but the outcome is determined by how they cope with the situation. Alosaimi et al. (2018), Beattie et al. (2023), Getahun et al. (2023), Kurimay

et al. (2017), Nelson and Sutton (1990), and Newton (1989) state that the life of a self-employed person is filled with stress. Vasumathi et al. (2003, p. 43) report that this is due to “industrialisation, urbanisation, consummation, and other reasons”. Entrepreneurs may be regarded as a disadvantaged group as they are at the forefront battling during COVID-19, which is one reason that is triggering stress (Kipkosgei, 2022). Many realised the detrimental effect of the crisis on their businesses (Eib & Bernhard-Oettel, 2023). During an economic downtime, the stressors experienced can also be related to how the organisation is performing and how it is affecting those working in that establishment (Van Zyl & Du Plessis, 2012). As such, this also shows how the psychological practitioners may experience stress, which in turn may affect the functioning of their private practice.

Burton and Elliott (2023) state that the pandemic had a negative impact on people’s well-being and therefore there is a need to support them to cope better with these difficult circumstances. When a person is experiencing stress, the different ways of dealing with it are called “coping styles” (Algorani & Gupta, 2022). Higgins and Endler (1995) report on the three forms of coping mechanisms, namely emotion-oriented, task-oriented, and avoidance-oriented coping styles. Emotion-oriented coping style refers to the use of emotions to deal with problems and this may include religion, humour, and acceptance. Task-oriented coping style is characterised by strategies one employs to solve problems that are causing stress. Avoidance-oriented coping style minimises and avoids stress-related issues. Certain coping techniques alleviate stress and bolster positive psychological results, whereas others escalate stress and exacerbate negative psychological outcomes. (Smith et al., 2016). During COVID-19, St-Jean and Tremblay (2023) believe that task-oriented and avoidance-oriented coping strategies were essential for the well-being of entrepreneurs and helped in minimising stress, whereas an emotion-oriented coping style had a negative impact on stress. They expanded on their proposition by stating that a task-oriented strategy allows others to come up with solid solutions to deal with the challenges, addressing the issue at hand and ultimately taking control of the situation. Avoidance allows entrepreneurs to take a step back, allowing them a temporary break from the stressor. Lastly, emotion-oriented coping strategies do not necessarily deal with the underlying issue which may lead to frustration and disheartenment. On the contrary, Olore et al. (2023) found task and emotion-oriented coping strategies as being the most effective.

Kulip et al. (2022) encourage the use of emotion-oriented coping strategy by focusing on managing emotions to mitigate fear related to COVID-19. Recommended interventions should incorporate acceptance, seeking emotional support, using humour, engaging in religious practices, and avoiding self-blame.

Folkman (2008) is of the view that positive and negative emotions could happen simultaneously during highly stressful situations. The positive and negative emotions could have a powerful impact on people's functioning (Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008). The Broaden-and-Build theory proposed by Fredrickson (2001) reveals that high levels of positive emotions, even in the face of stress, can broaden an individual's thought-action repertoires and build cognitive and behavioural abilities. Consequently, this process may foster the growth of favourable positive characteristics such as kindness to oneself, self-belief, empathy, emotional acumen, and individual capabilities. In light of this, the Broaden-and-Build theory may provide insight on coping with stressors during the pandemic. Cho et al. (2023) further explain the Broaden-and-Build theory by explaining its two essential parts, which are (a) broadening-action repertoires, and (b) building one's resources. The first part posits that positive feelings expand one's consciousness and encourage innovative, explanatory thoughts and behaviour. The second part suggests building long-term personal resources. According to Kohn (2020), this includes physical, intellectual, social and psychological resources that lead to resilience. Baron and Tang (2011) are of the view that the positive affect of an entrepreneur could lead to creativity and innovation.

Whilst the Broaden-and-Build theory has been widely used to understand the relationship between positive emotions and psychological resources, and provides valuable insights, it may not fully capture the complex nature of stress and coping. Therefore, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of stress and coping, this study also drew from Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. This model does not only focus on emotions, but also on employing problem-solving coping strategies which include dealing with the issues at hand (Frings, 2017). By integrating these two theoretical frameworks, this study aimed to provide a more nuanced understanding of how positive emotions can facilitate effective coping in the face of stressors. The affects are essential when coping with stress (Khosla, 2006). Thus, supporting individuals such as psychological practitioners

in private practice to cope better with difficult circumstances, such as the pandemic, may benefit their overall well-being and cognitive and behavioural resources, while also enabling them to think outside of the box despite the adversities they face.

2.5.4 Resilience

According to Rai et al. (2021), many industries such as aviation, hospitality, tourism, entertainment, and transportation are struggling as a result of COVID-19, with some on the brink of closure. Despite this, there are some organisations that are being resilient, while some are recovering quicker than others. The pandemic has exposed the lack of readiness of many businesses to manage significant emergencies. To navigate these obstacles, organisations must discover methods to enhance their ability to adapt to and withstand such adversities (Beninger & Francis, 2022). Various businesses are severely affected; however, the SMEs are particularly vulnerable. Moving towards a post-pandemic world, larger businesses may use aggressive tactics to regain their lost volumes and margins, potentially leaving smaller businesses behind. For SMEs to recover their market share, they must be innovative and rediscover themselves (Zutshi et al., 2021). As such, resilience becomes essential.

To answer one of the specific empirical aims of this research which was to explore how psychological practitioners protract their private practice and remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important to first establish what is resilience. Duchek (2019) indicates that research on resilience has been increasing steadily, but there is still a lack of agreement about its definition. Similarly, Vella and Pai (2019) state that resilience is a construct of positive psychology that has been researched for many years. Aguirre (2006, p. 1) defines resilience as “physical, biological, personality, social, and cultural systems' capability to effectively absorb, respond, and recover from an internally or externally induced set of extraordinary demands”. Generally, resilience can be seen the ability to bounce back (Ledesma, 2014; Vella & Pai, 2019). Conversely, Walker (2020, para.5) reports that resilience is not the tendency to bounce back but rather the “ability to adapt, change, to reorganise, while coping with disturbance”. Aldianto et al. (2021) refer to the importance of business resilience which is to adapt to environmental changes. Walker (2020) also states that a system that is resilient adapts itself and how it interacts amid a disturbance, therefore, transforming

how it functions, not necessarily changing the system itself. Because it is a learning system, it is likely to cope effectively with future disturbances.

With regard to resilience, the study centred on examining resilience from both the individual and organisational standpoint. Organisational resilience can come in many ways. Prayag et al. (2023) report that it can be promoted by enhancing leadership, which is an organisational resource that benefits the employees and the organisation. Being a leader involves addressing numerous obstacles in a constantly evolving and dynamic business environment (Southwick et al., 2017). To understand how leaders become resilient, Herrman et al. (2011) report on three different factors of resilience. Firstly, personal factors indicated that one's characteristics, internal locus of control, proficiency, cognitive appraisal, self-confidence, and positivity add to a person's resilience. Shambaugh (2010) was of the view that a person's characteristics, outlooks, and actions are the driving forces behind their ability to be resilient. The internal factors have a major impact on how a crisis is interpreted and handled (Ledesma, 2014). During these pandemic times, business leaders ought to manage their feelings effectively by demonstrating emotional intelligence (Margheritti et al., 2023). Pinos et al. (2006) report that concepts such as self-awareness, managing oneself, social perceptiveness, and interpersonal relationships which are embedded in emotional intelligence improve the leaders' understanding of themselves and others in achieving organisational objectives. High levels of emotional intelligence demonstrate self-mastery (Murugan, 2019) and enhance the decision-making process (Maulding, 2002). Whilst resilience is often looked at from a positive perspective, other researchers have considered its dark side, for example Chamorro-Premuzic and Lusk (2017) ask if too much resilience may be disadvantageous. They state that exceptionally high levels of resilience could lead to unachievable and unrealistic expectations, and often wasting time on useless exercises rather than focusing on achievable objectives. The psychological ideas of having a false sense of hope and thinking quite highly of oneself may come across as positivity and self-confidence, which may affect others in coping with challenges in a way that is sustainable and encourage thriving (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021). Fraser (2019) also reports that at times people tend to overplay resilience to a point where burnout and exhaustion become the norm. These tendencies can impact negatively on leadership, group, and organisational effectiveness (Chamorro-Premuzic & Lusk, 2017). Thus, balancing the

dark and positive sides of resilience involves recognising that while resilience can be an important asset for overcoming adversity, there can also be negative consequences when it is overused or misapplied.

Secondly, biological factors relate to changes in the brain and other biological mechanisms that impact an individual's capability to regulate negative emotions, and therefore influencing their resilience when faced with difficulties. Southwick et al. (2017, p. 318) state that this is fairly new research and that highlights that various neurochemicals have been identified as mediators of resilience through the body's reaction to stress. Among these are “adrenalin, noradrenalin, cortisol, dopamine, and neuropeptide Y”. Lastly, a good support system and community are environmental-systemic factors that enhance resilience. Sippel et al. (2015) mention various types of social support that include:

- Structural support: The individual's social circle size and reach, as well as the frequency of social interactions or engagements.
- Functional support: Seeing social interactions as being helpful in fulfilling their emotional or instrumental needs.
- Emotional support: Actions that promote a sense of ease, which may lead the person to believe that they are valued, appreciated, and/or cared for by others.
- Instrumental/material support: Goods and services that assist in solving a problem.
- Informational/cognitive support: Providing information that would assist to cope better with difficulties and adapting to the changes.

Considering the aforementioned factors, psychological practitioners could be viewed as leaders of their private practices and may benefit from the aforementioned factors in facilitating resilience. Hardy (2014) states that businesses should focus on their ability to address issues related to the growing complexities of their systems by focusing on enhancing resilience.

In addition to exploring resilience from an individual level, it is also crucial to examine it from an organisational perspective. Moreover, understanding the interplay between individual and organisational resilience could provide valuable insights into how resilience can be fostered and sustained in the workplace. Giustiniano et al. (2020)

report that to succeed, businesses and other groups need to turn challenges and unexpected events into innovative and long-lasting solutions. This requires finding a balance between unlearning old approaches and learning new ones and incorporating both reactive and adaptive elements of resilience. Therefore, strategic flexibility becomes essential. Aaker and Mascarenhas (1984) define strategic flexibility as the capacity of a business to adjust to significant, unpredictable, and rapidly unfolding (compared to the required response time) environmental alterations that significantly affect organisational performance. In addition to having sustainable resources, the ability to be strategically flexible is anticipated to have a major impact on surviving and recovering from a crisis (Kazozcu, 2011). Being agile implies that companies can transition between strategies and tend to be more proactive. Businesses with a proactive approach can scan their surroundings more effectively and identify opportunities and threats better than their competitors (Cingöz & Akdoğan, 2013).

Furthermore, Santos et al. (2023) report that new technologies have helped many organisations to be resilience while also avoiding bankruptcy. This was reaffirmed by Gómez et al. (2023) by stating that demonstrating innovation within the business model has been proven to enhance resilience in contrast to simply adopting a passive approach. It is one of the solutions that has helped entrepreneurs to adapt and redesign their businesses. Digital transformation is necessary to ensure continuity by transforming how people work using technology (Hai et al., 2021; Sujová & Kupcák, 2024). Many industries such as banking, finance, transportation, and public service in developing countries are getting onto the wagon (Hai et al., 2021). This is due to the growing competitive pressure that organisations are facing to enhance their performance (Wu et al., 2023). Similarly, Nkwankpa and Roumani (2016) report that enhancing organisational performance is considered a pivotal goal for any entity. They are progressively leveraging opportunities in analytics, large scale data analysis, cloud technology, social and mobile platforms to create digital business strategies that will help them to better compete in the market (Nkwankpa & Roumani, 2016). Aly (2020) adds that it builds on the advancement of various technologies such as telecommunication networks, computer technologies, software engineering as well as their use. Post-COVID-19 pandemic, the future use of video-based services and certain telephone services seems optimistic due to their apparent simplicity and utility (Molfenter et al., 2021). Pereira et al. (2022) report that the advancement in digital

technology presents great opportunities for SMEs to grow. Failure to take on this opportunity may result in lagging behind their rivals in the long term, which would subsequently lead to their shutdown as exemplified by Kodak. Despite this, Hai et al. (2021) note that most SMEs in developing countries take significant portions of all business; however, they are not taking advantage of digitisation. This was also emphasised by Gunasekaran et al. (2011), who indicate that SMEs need to adapt their strategies and technology to adjust to the changing environment as this would ensure that they remain competitive. Gicas et al. (2020) view the impact of COVID-19 on psychological practitioners as extensive and wide ranging, and that psychological assessments as a field are at a critical cross point. The option is to either remain stuck focusing on conventional methodologies or embrace the paradigm shift by capitalising on the technological innovations that have emerged in recent years. It is witnessed that some psychological practitioners in private practice took advantage of technology-based solutions, such as telehealth (Farrer et al., 2022) or telepsychology, as reported by Haddouk et al. (2023). Oudshoorn et al. (2021) report on psychologists who used videoconferencing to conduct psychological assessments and therapy for their clients during the pandemic. As such, Martínez-Cengotitabengoa et al. (2022) investigated the remote or virtual experience from the practitioner and client's perspective and found it to be satisfactory to both parties.

Nonetheless, there were some issues that were brought for consideration, and they include technological disruptions (Martínez-Cengotitabengoa et al., 2022), and validity of remote assessments (Gicas et al., 2020) were reported. Moreover, Al-Rwaidan et al. (2023) found that infrastructure, performance, and software as services had a substantial beneficial effect on the digital transformation of human resource (HR) practices. Its benefits include using cloud-based computing to view performance management in real time. For psychological practitioners whose private practice focuses on improving organisational effectiveness, and HR, DiRomualdo et al. (2018) report that operational and day-to-day HR functions will be supported by self-help services, digital assistants, and operational centres of excellence, while analytics and AI will provide insight on more pressing and strategic HR issues. Marr (2023) states that AI tools such as Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (ChatGPT) can aid in automating repetitive tasks, providing support in real time and improving clients' experiences relating to selection, performance management, on-boarding, training,

and compliance. Overall, resilient leadership and organisations require being adaptable to changing circumstances and taking advantage of opportunities while mitigating risks during times of crisis. This involves being open to changing strategies and utilising technology to enhance the effectiveness of work processes. By embracing these principles, businesses can become more agile, proactive, and capable of achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter comprised the literature review and the specific literature aims of the study. The review achieved its aims of conceptualising COVID-19 as a construct in psychology successfully, understanding the impact of the pandemic on the private practice of psychological practitioners, identifying initiatives to ensure competitiveness of the private practice, as well as understanding and conceptualising coping and resilience. Meta-theories and theoretical frameworks were also identified and discussed. Chapter 3 is presented as an article and encompasses the theoretical basis of the research, research methodology, results, and key conclusions of the study. It concludes by discussing the study's limitations, making recommendations for future research, and proposing potential implications for practice and policy.

Chapter 3: Research Article

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE PRIVATE PRACTICE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTITIONERS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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Abstract

Orientation: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many businesses worldwide and has brought about unprecedented changes, how organisations operate amid a pandemic. This study explored the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners, using a phenomenological hermeneutic perspective.

Research purpose: The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners.

Motivation for the study: Given the significant impact of COVID-19 on the economy, many businesses had to suspend production and services while others had to retrench their employees. As such, it is essential to explore how the private practices of psychological practitioners are adapting to the changes brought about by the pandemic.

Research approach/design and method: This study presents findings from a qualitative study and employs a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, which involves a detailed examination of the lived experiences and perspectives of psychological practitioners in private practice. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Main findings: The findings of the study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly undermined the viability of the private practices of psychological practitioners. This adverse effect primarily stemmed from a dearth of available business opportunities and insufficient financial resources. The research results discovered a range of adaptive strategies that practitioners employed effectively to fortify resilience and ensure the sustainability of their private practices.

Practical/managerial implications: The study highlighted a pressing need for increased support and resources for the businesses of psychological practitioners to navigate challenges effectively. It also highlighted strategies that ensure practices remain resilient and competitive during turbulent times.

Contributions/value-add: This study aimed to contribute to the existing literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners and to inform the development of effective strategies that can be utilised during challenging times, including future crises, to enhance coping, resilience, and sustainability of the private practice of psychological practitioners.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, psychological practitioners, private practice, coping, resilience, phenomenological hermeneutics.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Key focus of the study

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on many organisations globally, with some having to shut down as a result of government restrictions. As such, the aim of this study was to investigate the challenges imposed on the private practice of

psychological practitioners due to the pandemic, as well as the coping mechanisms and resilience implemented in their practices to adapt to the new circumstances. This insight aimed to inform the development of strategies and guidelines to support the sustainability of practices or businesses during future pandemics and turbulent worktimes.

3.1.2 Background of the study

The COVID-19 emerged in late 2019, and it was classified as a pandemic in January 2020 and rapidly spread worldwide (Chen et al., 2020; Hindson, 2020, Ozili & Arun, 2023). It shocked communities and economies as well as disrupting how businesses operate (Hussain & Hussain, 2023; Mishra, 2020). Many businesses saw a decline in business activity and sales (Dörr et al., 2022; Kyung & Whitney, 2020), leading to financial struggles, retrenchments, and companies closing (Aladejebi, 2020). A study by Kalogiannidis (2020) revealed that some Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) had enough funds to last them two weeks while others had enough for about two months. Shockingly, only 6% possessed enough cash reserves to survive one full year (Assefa, 2023). It is without a doubt that small businesses are the cornerstone of any economy and should be protected against the effects of COVID-19 (Engidaw, 2022).

Therefore, it is crucial for owners to strengthen their resilience and embrace a mindset focused on identifying opportunities (Liguori & Pittz, 2020). Highlighting the call to action, Rudolph et al. (2021) emphasise the important role of industrial and organisational psychology researchers and practitioners in actively adapting their work to address the challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19. They assert the need for a proactive approach, encouraging professionals in the field to explore innovative strategies, interventions, and adaptations to support workers, organisations, and society during these unprecedented times. This call to action resonates strongly with the focus of my research study, which aimed to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners. By aligning with the proactive approach advocated in the article, my study sought to contribute to the ongoing efforts of not only industrial psychology, but various psychological practitioners in adapting and enhancing private practices to meet the evolving needs of clients and organisations effectively in the wake of the pandemic.

3.1.3 Research purpose

Naidoo (2011, p. 47) reports that “research is the diligent systematic enquiry into nature and society to validate and refine existing knowledge and to generate new knowledge”. The general aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners.

The specific literature aims of the study were to conceptualise and understand COVID-19 as a construct in psychology, understand the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners, identify and conceptualise initiatives that psychological practitioners implement to protract their private practice and to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic, and understand and conceptualise the resilience and coping of psychological practitioners in their private practices.

The specific empirical aims were to understand the operations of private practice of psychological practitioners before and after COVID-19, explore the psychological practitioners’ perspective of which private practice services were mostly impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, explore how psychological practitioners protract their private practice to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic, and lastly, identify and formulate recommendations on resilient and coping strategies of psychological practitioners that can be implemented within their private practice for sustainability.

3.2 Trends from Literature

In December 2019, the outbreak of COVID-19 was identified in Wuhan, China, and was later declared a pandemic outbreak by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 (Assefa, 2023; Nazarov & Yarmukhamedova, 2024). The virus quickly spread across the world (excluding Antarctica), covering vast distances in a short period of time (Priyadarshini et al., 2020). It is reported that different regions such as Europe, the United States of America (USA) and Brazil experienced a greater impact of the pandemic. Assefa (2023) also states that on the African continent, Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa have documented the most COVID-19 cases. To contain the infection rate, quarantine and lockdown measures were introduced together with the limitations of people’s mobility, wearing masks, social distancing, monitoring, testing

and designated areas to treat those infected by the virus (Shah et al., 2020). As such, lockdown led to the closure of learning institutions, business premises, warehouses, places of worship, train stations and airspace (Joshi et al., 2020). Dechsupa et al. (2020) indicate that this was done to protect the public from contracting the virus. Alfano and Ercolano (2020) found that the implementation of lockdown policies had a favourable impact and assisted in reducing the number of COVID-19 cases in countries. While there is validity to this perspective, it affected the supply chain worldwide and the movement of goods across borders (Sharma & Mishra, 2023). Coccia (2021) states that the consequences of implementing extended periods of lockdown (longer than one month) have significant effects on the economic growth, leading to the reduction in the growth rate of the gross domestic product (GDP).

The fast-growing spread of the virus led to a worldwide economic downturn (Jackson et al., 2021; Piao et al., 2022; Susilawati et al., 2020), as studies show that the global economies were considerably affected (Joshi et al., 2020; Xiu, 2024). Many industries and sectors were affected, and Chen et al. (2022) report that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected many businesses in the service industry, such as aviation and tourism. Many other industries were affected, including entertainment (Moon, 2020), construction (Pamidimukkala & Kermanshachi, 2021), restaurants and hospitality (Dube et al., 2021), aviation (Maneenop & Kotcharin, 2020; To & Lee, 2024), and mining (Jowitt, 2020). Verschuur et al. (2021) state its impact in the manufacturing sector with losses of up to 11.8%. Small businesses were also impacted negatively by the restrictions of hard lockdown and more than 44% faced failure during the initial month of lockdown and only about 6% had sufficient financial reserves to sustain themselves for a year (Assefa, 2023). In Kalogiannidis' (2020) survey investigating the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses, the findings revealed varying financial implications among companies, with some having funds to sustain their operations for two weeks, while others only had sufficient cash reserves lasting up to two months. Many are grappling with financial constraints, prompting concerns about the survival prospects amid this economic downturn. While the government has implemented certain relief measures, they are likely to be inadequate in covering all the expenses faced by businesses (Baker & Judge, 2020).

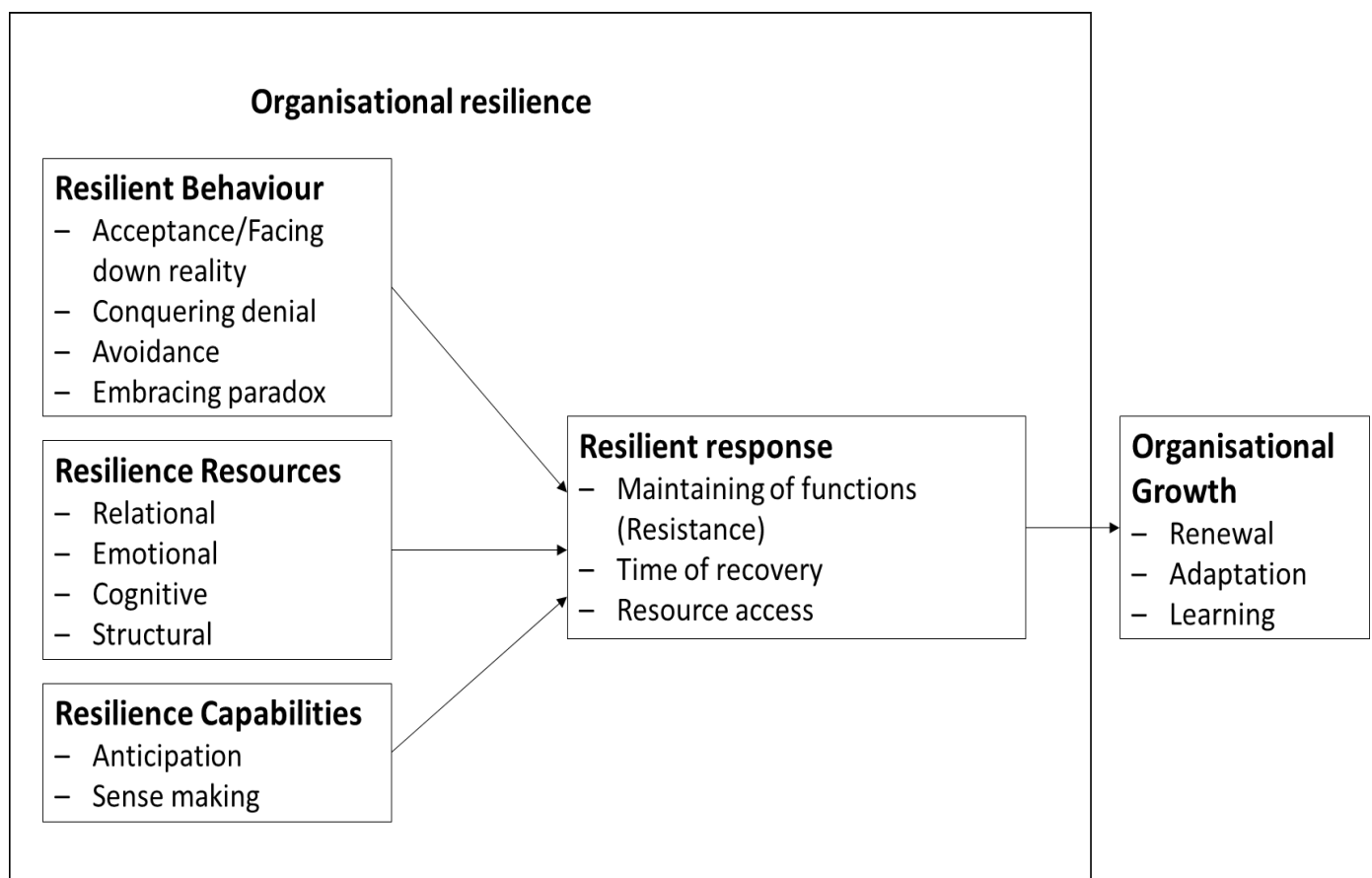
In response to the pandemic, a drastic change in how people work emerged, with more companies moving away from working in the office to working from home (Richards et al., 2023; Tagliaro & Migliore, 2022). Similarly, the private practices of psychological practitioners, which mostly operate as SMEs, confronted their share of challenges stemming from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sánchez-Guarnido et al. (2021) note a shift in the mode of consultations with psychological practitioners, transitioning from traditional face-to-face sessions to the use of telehealth platforms, commonly known as telepsychology. Although there has been a gradual return to in-person services as COVID-19 restrictions eased, telepsychology continues to be widely employed, albeit to a greater extent than before the pandemic. Nickelson (1998, p. 527) defines telehealth “as the use of telecommunications and information technology to provide access to health assessment, diagnosis, intervention, consultation, supervision, education, and information across distance. Behavioural telehealth is simply the application of the same technology to provide behavioural health services.” It encompasses the provision of remote services, which may be clinical or non-clinical in nature (McCord et al., 2020). In this literature review, the term “telehealth” will be specifically referred to as “telepsychology” to maintain consistency and clarity throughout the study. MacMullin et al. (2023) state that the expedited use of telepsychology as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic ensured service delivery while maintaining compliance with social distancing and self-isolation. As such, psychological practitioners considered telepsychology platforms to conduct assessments to mitigate the challenges brought forth by the virus (Farmer et al., 2020). The importance of conducting psychological assessments remotely was even more apparent during lockdown (Martínez-Cengotitabengoa et al., 2022). Furthermore, Tong et al. (2022) suggest having automated smartphone applications for mental health to increase access to psychological assistance. However, this would require psychological practitioners to have knowledge of how to enhance the effectiveness of such applications.

Considering the challenges faced, cultivating resilience was paramount for psychological practitioners in private practice as it empowers them and ensures that their practices not only withstand the pandemic, but also thrive in the face of adversity. Hillmann and Guenther (2021) capture the essence of organisational resilience by referring to it as the organisation capabilities to sustain core operations and rapidly

bounce back from disruptive challenges by marshalling and leveraging the necessary resources. During periods of significant volatility and uncertainty, organisations need to cultivate their resiliency by equipping themselves to manage unforeseen circumstances effectively, recover from crises, and potentially pave the way for future success (Duchek, 2019). Businesses demonstrating resilience are better positioned to navigate the shift into the post-COVID-19 era (Hadjielias et al., 2022). With reference to Figure 3.1, resilient behaviour, resilient resources and resilient capabilities are cause indicators that influence a resilient response. The outcome of how an organisation reacts to adversity is its capacity for growth and knowledge acquisition (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

Figure 3.1

Conceptual Integrative Model (Hillmann & Guenther (2021, p. 32)



It should be noted that distinguishing resilience between individual entrepreneurs or small business owners and their businesses can prove challenging (Gianiodis et al.,

2022), considering that there is a strong positive correlation between the two (Fatoki, 2018). On an individual level, the resilient behaviour and coping strategies of psychological practitioners can influence the success of their private practices in a pandemic. In terms of resilience resources, relational resources suggest the company's internal and external relationships such as employees, colleagues and other external networks – this may also include organisations such as the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) and the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa (SIOPSA); emotional resources refer to emotions to friendships and support, cognitive resources imply having the right skills and competencies; and structural resources mean organisational processes, structures and systems (Richtnér & Löfsten, 2014). Resilience capabilities involve anticipation, taking control by proactively predicting and averting potential threats before they cause harm (November et al. 2022; Petersen & Gurzawska, 2021; Wildavsky, 1988). Even though psychological practitioner can anticipate risks and numerous possibilities, there are some events that cannot be planned (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021), such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sharma and Rai (2023) discovered strategies to strengthen the resilience and facilitate the continued growth of SMEs. Their study recommended proactive financial planning to address uncertainties within the business environment. By developing and implementing financial strategies that account for potential risks and contingencies, SMEs could take measures needed in mitigating challenges. For instance, similar to a provident fund, companies could pay 1% of their revenue towards this fund. The study also highlights the importance of adopting financial security plans, such as insurance, to strengthen stability and ensure the long-term viability of businesses. Insurance policies, which involve regular premium payments, serve as a protective mechanism amid volatile business environments resulting from policy changes or unforeseen natural disruptions. By strengthening their financial foundations through financial planning, SMEs can enhance their resilience and sustainability (Sharma & Rai, 2023). Another resilience capability is sensemaking (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Weick et al. (2005) explain sensemaking as transforming circumstances into a situation that is explicitly understood in words and serves as a starting point for action. Weick et al. (2005) also state that attempts to make sense of a situation arise when there is a discrepancy between what is (current situation) and what should be

(anticipated situation), or when it is unclear how to interact with the world. In such cases, people tend to experience a shift from fully understanding what is happening to feeling lost or uncertain. Thus, to understand the disruption and regain clarity, individuals search for explanations that would allow them to continue their interrupted tasks and stay productive. These explanations that they seek are typically drawn from frameworks such as organisational rules, company principles, plans, anticipations, reasonable explanations, and conventional practices. If finding a way to resume the original project proves challenging, the process of sense making may lean toward either identifying alternative courses of action or engaging in further thoughtful consideration. Because the COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected event, many businesses, including the private practice of psychological practitioners, had to go through the sensemaking process. Sarkar and Clegg (2021) state that the arrival of the COVID-19 coronavirus had an abrupt and immediate effect on the functioning of organisations.

In maintaining stability, the private practice of psychological practitioners could respond to the pandemic via maintaining functions (resistance), time of recovery and accessing resources to maintain stability. These responses are elaborated further. Maintaining of functions (resistance) refers to ensuring that the organisational configurations such as its structure, strategies, or way of doing things remain the same during a disruption. It means how an organisation is set up – its structure, strategies, and ways of doing things (McCarthy et al., 2017). Moreover, SMEs can mitigate the adverse impacts of external crises by maintaining a positive outlook (Grözingen et al., 2021; Pozzobon, 2019). Gilly et al. (2014) propose that it is either that the organisation has sufficient skills, knowledge, and systems in place to respond adequately to a crisis or they lack enough information on how to deal with the disturbances and have to utilise internal skills to come up with creative ideas to respond effectively. In an event where there are limited skills internally, external assistance may be sourced (Gilly et al., 2014). In terms of time of recovery, Dua et al. (2020) and Pangestu (2021) suggest that large corporations tend to recover quicker than small businesses due to their financial stability. However, small businesses need to capitalise on their flexibility. This is because the pace at which organisations adapt is growing exponentially as it becomes essential for their survival and long-term viability (Chapman Cook & Kurau, 2023; Kodden, 2020). In addition, Baker and Nelson (2015) refer to the use of

entrepreneurial bricolage, which essentially means using available resources to solve new problems while also seeking opportunities. In line with the above, a resilient business can manage internal transformations brought about by external pressures effectively. This includes being able to adapt to the new environment, reinvent the organisation and learn from those experiences.

In addition, Khalil et al. (2022) and Khurana et al. (2022) report that digital technology had a substantial impact in bolstering the resilience of SMEs during the pandemic, contributing significantly to their endurance and sustainability. Despite the disruptive impact of the pandemic, it is evident that it served as a catalyst for innovation, particularly within the digital realm (Kang, 2021). Lee et al. (2023) also report significant levels of innovation in various domains, including products, services, and delivery methods, during these unprecedented times. Similarly, the field of psychology was not exempt from transformation, as Walker (2023) highlights that COVID-19 stimulated the development of a novel approach to psychological assessment, diagnosis, and psychotherapy utilising different digital platforms, such as audio and video, which were tailored for telepsychology. Emerging work trends are reshaping human behaviour and necessitate the need to integrate innovative technologies such as virtual reality (Weigel et al., 2023). Researchers noted that the world of psychology is changing rapidly, and slowly embracing technological advancements such as big data and artificial intelligence offers new opportunities to be explored (Cerf & Matz, 2022; Gado et al., 2022; Kosinski, 2023). By taking on the opportunity to research and incorporate new technologies in our field instead of solely relying on computer scientists and engineers, future psychological practitioners will sustain the pertinence of the field of psychology in the information age, referring to this as computational psychology (Kosinski, 2023). Considering the aforementioned, it is imperative for psychologists to acquire digital skills to ensure the proficient delivery of services (Dobson et al., 2022). Continuous professional development plays a pivotal role in sustaining competence and fostering innovation in one's professional practice, as emphasised by Rossouw and Hatty (2013). Furthermore, it is worth noting that such ongoing development is mandated for psychological practitioners registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

3.3 Research design

According to Sileyew (2019), a research design aims to establish a suitable structure for conducting a study. This study adopted qualitative research, which Bhangu et al. (2023, p. 39) referred to as the methods of inquiry that depend on non-statistical, non-numerical data gathering and analytical techniques to generate evidence and insights. In essence, it makes sense of people's experiences (Bozkurt & Öztürk, 2022; Mohajan, 2018). The validity of qualitative research does not rely on a substantial number of participants, as typically demanded in quantitative research; instead, it hinges on the thoroughness of the researchers' methodological involvement (Surawy-Stepney et al., 2023). An approach grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology was adopted utilising in-depth semi-structured interviews. In the following sections, the research methodology, research approach, research strategy and research method are discussed.

3.3.1 Research approach

In this study, an interpretivist research approach grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology was adopted. This approach is rooted in the belief that each person constructs their own version of reality; and as a result, there are as many different realities as there are people, and that reality is actively shaped by how language is used to interpret and describe what we see, hear, and think about the world. This is known as ontology (Scotland, 2012). The epistemological stance aligns with the view that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005). It focuses on my capacity as the researcher, can acquire knowledge and understanding to expand, widen, and enhance comprehension within my research area (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). By embracing this interpretive paradigm, it becomes evident that human behaviour and experiences cannot be reduced to quantitative data alone but require a deep exploration of context and individual perspectives. Furthermore, this research approach, guided by hermeneutic phenomenology, allows us to engage in a dialogic interpretation of lived experiences. Godden and Kutsyuruba (2023) opine that hermeneutic phenomenology embodies the core principles of both hermeneutics, which are concerned with the interpretation and comprehension of meaning, and phenomenology, which delves into the examination of people's lived experiences and their organisation within consciousness. As such, the aim of the

hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of psychological practitioners whose private practices were impacted by COVID-19.

3.3.2 Research strategy

Hermeneutical phenomenology involves the depiction and analysis of the core aspects of lived experiences, recognising their importance in pedagogy, psychology, and sociology, drawing from collected experiences. It includes thorough and structured procedures that address the ethical dimensions of everyday occurrences, aspects that are often challenging to explore using conventional research methods (Guillen, 2019). For the context of this study, information was gathered using in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 participants and interpreted through the application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The research method used is discussed in the next sections.

3.3.3 Research method

According to Kothari (2004), the systematic approach employed to address and resolve research problems in a scientific manner. It can be viewed as the study of methods and principles guiding how research is rigorously executed and validated. On the other hand, research methods refer to the approaches employed for gathering and evaluating data (Jackson, 2013; Kothari, 2004). Following is the discussion on the research setting, the entrée and establishment of researcher roles, sampling, data collection methods, the recording of data, strategies to ensure data quality and integrity, data analysis, and reporting style.

3.3.3.1 Research setting

The research was conducted in a virtual setting, engaging psychologists and psychometrists as participants. This virtual platform served as the primary environment for data collection and interactions with the research participants. Given the unique circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting the research in a virtual space was not only practical but also necessary to ensure the safety and convenience of the participants. Through videoconferencing, the research

setting facilitated open and honest discussions regarding the impact of the pandemic on their private practices, allowing for in-depth exploration of their experiences.

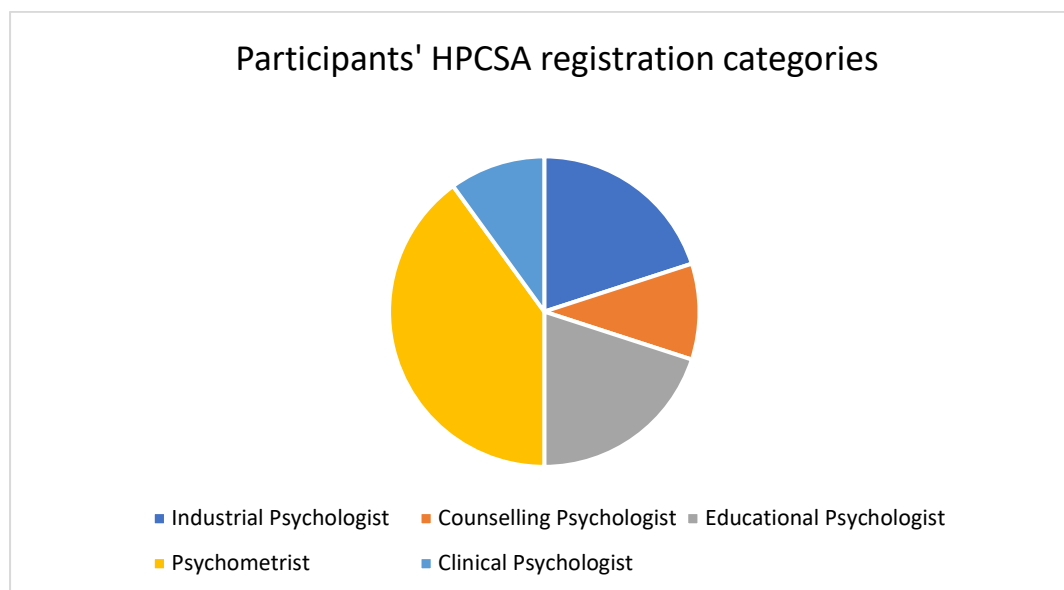
3.3.3.2 Entrée and establishing researcher role

A psychological consulting practice acted as the gatekeeper, facilitating access to participants who were registered psychologists and psychometrists with the HPCSA. Those who expressed interest in participating were contacted, and interview arrangements were made according to their schedules and convenience. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. A strong commitment to maintaining their confidentiality was also emphasised. Consequently, they signed a written consent form for participation. Furthermore, the research received ethical clearance from the Ethics Research Committee within the College of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of South Africa (UNISA), ensuring adherence to ethical standards throughout the study. The research was conducted by means of an online platform to comply with COVID-19 restrictions.

3.3.3.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used for this study. In the context of purposive sampling, it is essential to establish clear and specific criteria for both including and excluding individuals from the sample selection (Stratton, 2023). As indicated in Figure 3.2, 10 participants working in private practice as psychological practitioners were selected and they all met the following criteria:

- Individuals who are registered with the HPCSA as psychologists (Clinical, Counselling, Industrial, and Educational) and psychometrists. However, research psychologists did not make part of the study.
- Working in a private practice.
- Between 25 and 65 years of age.

Figure 3.2*Participants' HPCSA Registration Categories***Table 3.1***Participant Information*

Participant pseudonym	Primary document number (Transcribed interview)	Professional category	Race	Gender	Age
Participant 1	Participant 1	Psychometrist	Black	Female	43
Participant 2	Participant 2	Psychometrist	Black	Female	34
Participant 3	Participant 3	Psychometrist	Black	Female	38
Participant 4	Participant 4	Industrial Psychologist	Coloured	Male	42
Participant 5	Participant 5	Psychometrist	Black	Male	38
Participant 6	Participant 6	Counselling Psychologist	Black	Female	38
Participant 7	Participant 7	Clinical Psychologist	Black	Female	64

Participant 8	Participant 8	Educational Psychologist	Coloured	Female	57
Participant 9	Participant 9	Educational Psychologist	Coloured	Female	63
Participant 10	Participant 10	Industrial Psychologist	White	Female	54

3.3.3.4 Data collection methods

The predominant method of data collection for qualitative research is semi-structured interviews that were used in this study and an adaptable interview guide was followed (Pistrang & Barker, 2012). Although data suitable for IPA analysis can be acquired using various methods, such as personal narratives and journals, the most effective and commonly used approach for collecting data in IPA studies is typically the semi-structured interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The interviews were arranged in a virtual format, primarily through Microsoft Teams, although Zoom was also occasionally employed. The interviews were conducted at a time and day that accommodated the participant's convenience. The interviews were recorded and captured for further analysis, and notes were taken for further clarification and expansion. Probing was also crucial to extract rich and comprehensive information from all 10 participants about their lived experiences relating to the impact of COVID-19 on their private practice. This ultimately led to data saturation where new information was no longer added to the conversation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021; Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024; Tight, 2023).

3.3.4 Data management

As the research manager, it was my responsibility as the researcher to implement adequate safeguards for securing the collected data (Alase, 2017). To provide an additional layer of security, this research study ensured the removal of all videos, audio, and recorded content after it was transcribed, to safeguard the participants' confidentiality and well-being (Alase, 2016). The data were stored on the cloud with password protection in place to ensure its confidentiality.

3.3.5 Data analysis

Since the establishment of the IPA in the late 1990s, it has gained widespread recognition as one of the most comprehensive and practical methodologies for undertaking phenomenological research (Behal, 2022). IPA focuses on the unique personal experiences individuals undergo and the process of ascribing meaning to those experiences (Alase, 2017; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). An idiographic method was employed, where each interview was initially analysed on an individual basis before proceeding to a group-level analysis, where themes were identified across transcripts for the entire group (Quinn & Clare, 2008). It is essential to note that although there are commonalities in how researchers employ IPA, the relatively recent emergence of IPA as a research approach makes it receptive to adaptation and creative evolution (Bartoli, 2019), and as a result, there is no fixed or strict method for conducting an IPA (Quinn & Clare, 2008). While initially referencing Larkin and Thompson's (2012) IPA process, this study has adopted the guide proposed by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014, pp. 12-13), which essentially follows the same IPA method with varying steps.

Table 3.2

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Data Analysis Steps by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014, p. 12-13)

IPA Stages	IPA Description	Activity
Stage 1	Multiple reading and making notes	This first stage entailed going through the transcripts and audio a few times to grasp a deeper understanding and making notes of important details (Bartoli, 2019; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 1999). It was also important to immerse myself in the data on each case as every time I revisited the material, I discovered fresh and intriguing insights, further enriching my

		engagement with the lived experiences of the participants (Tomkins, 2017). This was done to ensure that no mistakes were made during the transcription process.
Stage 2	Transforming notes into emergent themes	In this stage, it was important to condense the notes made in the previous stage into brief expressions with the goal of encapsulating the fundamental essence of the text's content (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Here, attention was given to the notes rather than transcripts with the aim to develop a succinct phrase at a slightly elevated level of abstraction, potentially representing more psychologically-oriented psychological conceptualisation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Themes and classifications based on the response patterns exhibited by the participants about the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners were generated (Alase, 2017). As Chatfield (2022) and Alase (2017) had already alluded to, the process was quite arduous but necessary.
Stage 3	Seeking relationships and clustering themes	This stage involved seeking relationships among the emerging themes and categorising them based on conceptual resemblances. After emerging themes (including main themes and sub-themes) were organised into clusters, they were

		verified by comparing them to the original transcribed content to confirm their alignment with the participants' actual statements (Fade, 2004). This process in the data analysis was done for each participant. Furthermore, themes that did not align with the emerging structure were eliminated or excluded.
Stage 4	Writing an IPA study	The analysis conducted above lead to a narrative report for the study. This stage is concerned with addressing the themes found in the final table while also ensuring that themes were supported by excerpts from interviews. It was important to differentiate between the participants' statements and the researcher's interpretations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

3.3.6 Reporting on the data

This is reported in detail under findings in section 3.4.

3.3.7 Strategies employed to ensure quality research

Quality and rigour in any research are crucial (Haverkamp, 2005). The rigour required in qualitative research is referred to as trustworthiness, which includes credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Therefore, the following strategies were utilised to ensure quality research.

- **Credibility:** The semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded via MS Teams and occasionally on the Zoom platform as a means to conduct interviews while adhering to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines. The participants agreed to the recording of the interviews at the start of each interview session. During the interviews, participants were prompted to substantiate their statements with

instances, and additional questions were asked for clarification (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, data were collected over a period of three months.

- **Transferability:** Younas et al. (2023) report that transferability enables researchers to evaluate how relevant they are in different environments and situations. The research process was followed meticulously, involving a clear description of the research process, which includes data collection and the study's context as extensively described within this study, while also being mindful of ethical considerations and its limitations. Additionally, transferability was addressed through purposive sampling (Awan et al., 2023).
- **Dependability:** This suggests that when employing methods to demonstrate that a study could be replicated under identical conditions, using the same procedures and participants, comparable outcomes would be achieved (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013; Shenton, 2004). As a result, the research process was clear and easy to follow, allowing other researchers to check and track the steps and methods used. However, considering the subjective philosophical notion underlying a hermeneutic phenomenological approach which was the foundation of this study, the assumption can be made that the researcher's and participants' perspective may change over time (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Consequently, the question of whether dependability can be assured within this study becomes a point of uncertainty. Nevertheless, in light of this consideration, ensuring the transparency of the research process becomes pivotal. This transparency allows future researchers to replicate the study and use it as a "template", even though the outcome may vary (Shenton, 2004).
- **Confirmability:** Confirmability focuses on ensuring that both the data and interpretations of the results are obtained from collected data and not products of my imagination (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure conformability, I practised self-reflection in terms of a journal to reflect my ideas, emotions and presumptions (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017).

3.3.8 Research procedure and ethical considerations

In adhering to the ethical guidelines, ethical clearance was obtained from UNISA's ethics committee. Each participant was informed about the voluntary participation in the study, confidentiality and rights and responsibility. Informed consent is the

fundamental principle of research (Bharathi et al., 2024; Mandal & Parija, 2014). In this study, all the participants consented to being part of the study. The process was clearly communicated and participants were given opportunities to ask any questions relating to the process. It was communicated that their information would remain confidential and adherence to the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA) was maintained. In social research, confidentiality and anonymity are closely intertwined, with anonymity being the means through which confidentiality is put into practice (Dube et al., 2014). As such, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants and they were referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on. Additionally, in line with ethical considerations to avoid any potential harm to the participants (Bharathi et al., 2024; Buchanan & Warwick, 2021; Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009), the research was carried out through virtual means using MS Teams and Zoom, in compliance with COVID-19 social distancing measures.

3.4 Findings

The specific empirical aims were to understand the operations of private practice of psychological practitioners before and after COVID-19, and to explore the psychological practitioners' perspectives of which private practice services were mostly affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, explore how psychological practitioners protract their private practices and to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic, and lastly to identify and formulate recommendations on resilient and coping strategies of psychological practitioners that can be implemented within their private practices for sustainability and future research. The following section offers a thorough analysis and discussion of the empirical findings.

The sample materials comprised interview transcripts from 10 psychological practitioners who experienced the impact of COVID-19 in their private practices. The interview guide consisted of some of the following questions: (1) How was your business prior to the pandemic? (2) During hard lockdown, were you operating? How were you surviving? (3) How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your private practice? (4) How did you and your organisation cope with the changes that arose as a result of the pandemic? (5) Could you explain the mechanisms that you employed to ensure the sustainability of your private practice? (6) What are the lesson learned as a

psychological practitioner in private practice about a pandemic? (7) What kind of support is essential in ensuring the sustainability of private practice during a pandemic?

The themes that emerged from this study are divided into themes, sub-themes and categories. Each of these are discussed under their groupings, as depicted in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3*Summary of Themes, Sub-themes and Categories*

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
COVID-19's impact on private practices	Business impact	Reduced work opportunities
		Transitioning to virtual work
	Financial impact	A lack of business income
		Utilising personal savings and loans
Adaptation strategies	Coping mechanisms	Spiritual-oriented coping
		Therapy
	Network of support	Colleagues and peer support
		Family and friends support
	Adaptability and resilience	Optimism and embracing change
		Making use of technology
		Networking and marketing
		Continuous learning and skills development
		Expanding the range of services
	Future financial planning	Business savings
		Adopting a multi-income strategy
		Financial plans

The following section offers an integration of the results concerning the viewpoints of the participants and the researcher's comprehension and analysis of those viewpoints.

Theme 1: COVID-19's impact on private practices

The participants were asked to explain the impact of COVID-19 on their private practices. From the discussions and interpretation of data, COVID-19's impact on private practices was significant as this emerged as a main theme. It was apparent that the pandemic had a negative impact on their businesses. As such, this theme consisted of the following sub-themes: Business and financial impact.

Sub-Theme 1: Business impact

The first sub-theme that emerged was the business impact as a result of COVID-19. Many entrepreneurs found themselves facing a situation where they were either not receiving any work at all or encountering a drastic decrease in work opportunities. As such, two categories, namely (a) reduced work opportunities, and (b) transitioning to virtual work, were identified. These categories are discussed below.

a) Reduced work opportunities

It became evident that, prior to the onset of lockdown measures, the private practices of psychological practitioners were doing well, and they were hopeful of the prospects of their businesses, as articulated by Participants 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9. As a result of lockdown, these participants reported a substantial adverse impact of the pandemic on their businesses and the sentiments were also shared by Participants 4 and 10. This impact was evident in the form of reduced work opportunities, which represent a category within the broader sub-theme of business impact. Furthermore, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of work opportunities were substantial enough for Participant 2 to seek full-time employment as an alternative.

Prior to the to the pandemic, the business was doing extremely well. And there were so many opportunities and, I feel that the business actually at ... before COVID, I saw that the business was going to flourish even further because of how the client base was growing. And how the scope of the businesses was also expanding. So, we were sort of in the right track and we were, we were growing and there were plans as well to employ people ... So, during hard lock

down in March and I think a greater part of April we were not operating at all... May somewhere there, late May, beginning of June, we started to open up but the restrictions were quite difficult. (Participant 1)

It [COVID-19] really affected my private practice because I know today, I would have been far [business-wise] the way things were going at that moment. Today I would have been far ... that's the reason why I applied for a permanent job [during COVID] ... because I was tired. I was gatvol [fed-up] of sitting at home. (Participant 2)

Unfortunately surviving during this period was particularly difficult simply because the steady stream of work stopped. (Participant 4)

We were doing well. We were like on the upward spiral like in terms of business. The potential was there with so many clients in the pipeline that we were meant to work with and some of which we've had already started ... During COVID-19, we did not see clients. (Participant 6)

I was even working for one company doing assessments as well. And I used to go there twice a week. But when COVID started, they didn't renew the contracts ... so that company kept me quite busy ... It was very slow during COVID. (Participant 7)

[Prior to the pandemic] I was very hopeful, because I really thought that things had picked up really well, and that it would continue picking up, you know, because even from a client perspective, it seemed positive, like they could be more work in the pipeline. (Participant 8)

So I only started working, but in July of that same year [2020], it was still during the hard lockdown, but very little minimal. And I think we've never actually really fully recovered. If I think back about how busy I used to get ... Last year [2022] was where things really started picking up and normalising. (Participant 9)

The first year, 2020 was still fine because I had savings that I could use. But the impact of 2020, I think hit me in 2021 when all my savings were done, and the work was not doing well at all. (Participant 10)

b) Transitioning to virtual work

The other category emerging from the business impact was transitioning to virtual work. COVID-19 can be seen as a catalyst that accelerated the ongoing global trend of adopting new emerging technologies, leading to changes in how people live, perform their work, and approach organisational strategies (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). Participants 4, 5, 6, and 10 reported on how they had to transition from face-to-face to virtual work.

The major difference for me was that prior to the pandemic, everything was face to face ... However, when the pandemic hit everything changed, literally everything is now virtual, with how I accumulate CPD points, manage bookings, conducting assessments, feedback, meetings with stakeholders, etc. ... leaving with anything face to face a rarity. (Participant 4)

I did not see them [clients] physically like we would do prior to COVID ... we then had to resort to virtual consultation, and you would remember I think that this was something that was not allowed prior to COVID-19, you had to see clients physically but I think that the legal fraternity was flexible enough to accept the virtual consultations. (Participant 5)

I would say 98% of my sessions were face to face before the pandemic ... we opted for virtual meetings, telephonic consultations from, you know, after that strict lockdown. So now the problem is that I didn't believe in a virtual and telephones because I'm old school anyway. I'm so used to being in contact with the client because it's easier. You get to connect more when you're sitting like this. You know, communicating face to face. So, I felt like I'm going to lose that connection. Hence, you know, I was a bit sceptical when it came to, you know, starting with virtual ... So, I would say that virtually, that is sort of barrier [inability to analyse body language], because you could easily misread a person's body language because this person is not right here next to you. (Participant 6)

Previous before COVID when there is panel feedbacks, I had to drive into town to do face to face. Now that is one out of 10, you know, mostly it's via Teams or Zoom - which saves time, which saves petrol, it saves a lot so ... (Participant 10)

While other psychological practitioners were receptive to the new way of working from the outset, Participant 6 was resistant to the idea but was eventually accepting upon realising that it was impacting on financial earnings.

But you know, I kept on rejecting such referrals [virtual]. But along the way, I saw that I was no longer earning much. Meaning, how I was no longer affording rent, I was no longer affording my own salary. Then I decided no, it's not working for me. Then it means I need to force myself to accept that, now I need to start doing virtual and telephonic [sessions] and then when I started with it, then things started picking up. (Participant 6)

On the other hand, Participant 7 encountered technical challenges when changing to virtual work which proved to be a source of frustration for both the practitioner and the client. Consequently, Participant 7 made the decision to revert to in-person interactions.

Also, I struggled with online, offering therapy online. For me, I found it quite difficult and the few sessions that I did online, they didn't work out in terms of the clients didn't book for the next session and because my network was also not smooth, there were hiccups in between. So that was a big, big challenge for me, and I decided to stop having therapy online. If people are not able to come face to face, well, I can't, I wouldn't see them online. It wasn't easy for me and probably it was frustrating for the client as well ... maybe also my attitude because I rely on a lot from body language. Your body language says a lot to me, so I think I went in there reluctantly and obviously it didn't work. Especially when now, we are talking with someone who is in Dubai online and then you have challenges with network. I didn't feel good, so that is why I felt, let me stop this. And I see my colleagues still see people virtually. There are those who are

comfortable with that. But I think, I like the face to face and it's because now I also look at the non-verbal cues. (Participant 7)

Sub-Theme 2: Financial impact

The second sub-theme that emerged was the financial impact the pandemic had on their private practices and how participants struggled to make ends meet during the pandemic. This sub-theme consisted of two categories, namely (a) a lack of business income, and (b) utilising personal savings and loans. They are discussed as follows.

a) A lack of business income

Psychological practitioners were unable to generate revenue for their private practices following the lack client appointments as a result of lockdown, and for some, the income earned was not what they used to make. This led to financial difficulties and a reduced capacity to maintain the previous standard of living. This was also supported by research indicating that due to the prolonged curfew and lockdown measures, SMEs began to experience the financial strain brought about by the pandemic (Al-Fadly, 2020), as there was a decline in revenue while their expenses remained, leading to cash flow challenges (Mason & Hruskova, 2021). Based on the collected data, it is evident that the participants experienced the financial repercussions of the pandemic, primarily stemming from the fact that their private practices were not yielding any financial benefits.

At that time, you obviously thinking you know money is still coming. I took it easy to say business is going continue as usual, but to my disappointment, business never continued as usual. So, from the 15th of April, I never had contracts, so I wasn't working that much, but we started feeling it sometime around May when there was no money coming in. (Participant 2)

So, we were not getting anything and I don't remember getting anything in 2020. (Participant 5)

There was no income during that time. (Participant 6)

There wasn't income coming. (Participant 7)

It just completely died. I went bankrupt. (Participant 9)

The absence of financial income had a direct impact on their ability to cover business expenses. In addition, this financial strain extended beyond the organisational sphere into other areas of the psychological practitioners' lives, including their capacity to afford basic necessities that were previously within their means. This is apparent from the experiences of Participants 2, 6, 9 and 10.

Because at that time of COVID, I couldn't even pay my car. I think for the whole year, I wasn't paying. I don't know how they never took my car or anything like that, but I just never paid. (Participant 2)

So literally, there was nothing that we were getting, and we were unable to pay for rent, paying other personal responsibilities like your instalments, insurance and all those other policies, medical aid and all that. (Participant 6)

I had to ask the bank to put a hold on my bond repayment. Insurances as far as possible. I didn't pay my life insurance and all. (Participant 9)

So, it was quite difficult financially. Yeah, I did quite a few loans and, you know, with the banks giving some leniency in terms of car payments and house. (Participant 10)

The lack of business income led to financial difficulties which prompted the need to explore alternative avenues to ensure the sustainability of the private practices. This, in turn, leads to the next category in the financial impact sub-theme which is elaborated on in the following discussion.

b) Utilising personal savings and loans

In an attempt to bridge the financial gap created by the decline in income, Participants 5, 7, 8 and 10 used their personal savings as well as loans or temporary financial relief from friends, families, and the bank.

We had to somewhat fund the business from own pocket from the little work that we had done, but I must say it was very difficult, we even had to take some loans so that we had to keep ourselves going but it wasn't easy, I mean up to date we're still picking up the pieces that we experienced during COVID19 ... So, we never received anything from government (Temporary Employee Relief Scheme - TERS), we did everything, but nothing ... we also had to take money from our partners, our family members, ask money to keep the business going to pay some of the expenses that we had as a business ... but I think we'll only be able to fully enjoy those (post-COVID profits) once we are done repaying with the loans that we have accumulated as a result of the pandemic. (Participant 5)

So as a family, we had some reserves ... but we realised that we need to be very careful that we don't exhaust the resources that we have because there wasn't more coming in. There was a lot going out. (Participant 7)

And I had to dig into my savings, cashing policies, for example. And that is how I survived by cashing in some of the policies that I had, because the cash flow that I was getting, that was coming in, was just not enough to sustain me ... I didn't actually have (savings) anything specifically for business. (Participant 8)

So, it was quite difficult financially. Yeah, I did quite a few loans and, you know, with the banks giving some leniency in terms of car payments and house and I also got money from the UIF. (Participant 10)

The pandemic clearly had a negative impact on the private practices of psychological practitioners, and also made changes on how they conducted their day-to-day activities. Nonetheless, this led to the emergence of the other main theme that is discussed in the next section.

Theme 2: Adaptation strategies

The other main theme that emerged was *adaptation strategies*. Adaptation strategies are measures that psychological practitioners put in place after COVID-19 had a negative impact on their businesses and finances. In the face of unprecedented

disruptions, practitioners demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity by implementing a range of adaptive measures to navigate the challenges presented by the global health crisis. This theme consisted of the following sub-themes: Coping mechanisms, network of support, adaptability and resilience, and future financial planning.

Sub-Theme 1: Coping mechanisms

The first sub-theme that emerged from the adaptation strategies theme was coping mechanisms and it highlights how participants coped with the pandemic while making sense of it. From this sub-theme, the following two categories were identified: (a) spiritual-oriented coping, and (b) therapy.

a) Spiritual-oriented coping

Emotion-oriented coping strategies are intended to minimise the influence of a stressor that cannot be changed, prevented or seen as beyond their control (Govender et al., 2015). It can include various approaches, such as religion, humour, and acceptance. During the pandemic, individuals turned to their religions to help them cope with the uncertainties of the situation. This is because religion is viewed as a useful method for dealing with the daily challenges faced by individuals (Pushparaj et al., 2022; Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020). Positive forms of religious coping, internalised religious conviction, and belief in God were linked to less anxiety and better positive results, while negative types of religious coping and a lack of trust in God were tied to contrasting outcomes (Imran et al., 2022), such as depression, reduced life satisfaction, psychological challenges, and being insensitivity to others (Pargament et al., 1998). Overall, spirituality/religion plays crucial roles in sustaining wellness (Arrey et al., 2016) and fostering resilience (Manning et al., 2019; Schwalm et al., 2022). Notably, Participants 1, 3, 9 and 10 used their spiritual orientation and faith to help them cope with the impact of the pandemic.

COVID has really left us in a situation where I think we were really taking faith into the business more than anything. (Participant 1)

My other support system was my congregation. My spiritual needs are very important. (Participant 3)

So, I'm a religious person. If you haven't picked that up. So even during COVID, although I couldn't go to church, I fellowshipped online. I made sure that I do that. I read scriptures, pray every day, that kind of thing. And that's where I drew my strength from. (Participant 9)

My faith, my belief in God, I think that helped a lot to just to keep me going on. (Participant 10)

However, Participant 4 utilised a task-oriented coping strategy often focus on understanding the issue, coming up with solutions, identify pros and cons and deciding on the best course of action (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Participant 4's perspective offers a practical illustration of this approach as their coping plan included reallocating available funds towards an investment, even though the challenging economic conditions caused by the pandemic could reduce the interest rates on that investment. Despite these setbacks, Participant 4 made an informed decision and committed to a plan with a forward-looking outlook and a desire to establish a financial planning routine.

Part of my coping plan was to reallocate freed-up finances towards an investment. Although another setback was that any investment at the time of the pandemic would yield quite low returns as the repo was quite low during the pandemic. I was aware of this but continued still on this path with the view to the future and to also get myself "into the habit" so to speak. (Participant 4)

b) Therapy

Recognising the need for therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic was a needed measure for Participants 1, 7 and 10 as they grappled with the challenges brought on by this global crisis. This awareness reflected a proactive response to the emotional and psychological strains of the pandemic, underscoring the importance of seeking professional support to navigate the unprecedented and trying times.

I also started doing for counselling. Yeah, because sometimes I feel like that. I think that we cannot share with friends and family. So, we just need a safe environment where, you know, we can talk. (Participant 3)

It was important as a psychologist that I also have someone to talk to, like another psychologist ... because at times you can get overwhelmed by some of the things that are happening in life. (Participant 7)

I, myself went to see a psychologist. (Participant 10)

Sub-theme 2: Network of support

The second sub-theme that emerged was network of support. It implies a system of individuals, resources, or organisations that provide assistance, encouragement, and guidance to someone in need. This network is crucial for creating a safety net, fostering emotional well-being, and offering practical help during challenging times, ensuring that those in need can lean on a collective of friends, family, and/or professionals to address their various needs. Two different categories were identified as supporting networks and are subsequently discussed, namely: (a) colleagues and peer support, and (b) family and friends' support.

a) Colleagues and peer support

Participants 3, 7, and 9 collectively highlighted the important role of reaching out and engaging with colleagues, peers, and professional networks in fostering resilience and coping during difficult circumstances.

Associating yourself with other people who are in the same boat as yourself is important. (Participant 3)

And I think I told you about this chat, group chat of psychologists. It's helpful to be in touch with people. For instance, they would advertise. We need to accumulate CPD points, so they will advertise 'there's a workshop here and there', 'there's a client that needs this, can I refer them to you?' So that is very, very important. It's very supportive. (Participant 7)

The other big lesson for me was to reach out and ask for help because there are always people willing to and prepare to help you, but you must ask. (Participant 9).

Furthermore, Participants 4 and 10 suggested that the presences and visibility of psychological governing bodies was not seen during the pandemic and that they should have assisted practitioners in mitigating challenges and putting the profession at the forefront.

Better communication and guidance from the HPCSA immediately preceding and following an announcement about a pandemic. Communication and guidance initially were very slow from the HPCSA. This would be nice as to ensure that we as practitioners are nicely aligned and all singing from the same hymn so to speak. And also, to allow us to better guide our clients. (Participant 4)

Keeping contact with my connections and say, is it going bad your side as well? What's going on your side? Is it just me? So, keep contact with my network. Encourage each other in terms of the business world and then just take one day at a time ... what I'm thinking is that governing bodies like the HPCSA, SIOPSA or PsySSA, I thought that those type of bodies could have come more to the front and assist. Not physically assist but support in terms of 'listen guys, we are all in the same situation. This is what this person is doing. Maybe you can do this?', 'How do we support each other?' So, support each other. More leadership from our governing bodies in situations like that. They could have said, listen guys, we are psychologists, we are in a position to help, let's see how we can do this. We have this project, that project which we'll roll it out, not something very fancy. Just they put the profession on. (Participant 10)

b) Family and friends' support

The role of family and friends' support during the pandemic was unmistakably crucial, as highlighted by multiple participants. Participant 2 acknowledged that the presence and unity of family may have assisted in preventing experiencing feelings of depression. It was reported by Padmanabhanunni et al. (2023) that social support

assisted in mitigating the impact of depression and feelings of hopelessness. Participant 7 reported maintaining connections with family through regular online interactions and. Participant 9 reflected on the value of open and confiding communication within their family. This was also affirmed by Participant 10.

I could have suffered from depression, I don't know but somehow, I never did, because we stayed together as a family. (Participant 2)

Maybe having family around me. You know, we made sure that every week we see our children, you know, and we talk with family online. (Participant 7)

I also spoke a lot to my sister and my two daughters. You know, we speak openly. So, we kind of confided in each other. (Participant 9)

I survived through a lot of support from family and friends. (Participant 10)

Sub-theme 3: Adaptability and resilience

Adaptability and resilience emerged as the third sub-theme of the study. It highlights the various strategies that the practitioners had to employ to ensure the sustainability of within their businesses. Adaptability and resilience consist of the following categories: (a) Optimism and embracing change, (b) making use of technology, (c) networking and marketing, (d) continuous learning and skill development, and (e) adopting a multi-income strategy and expanding the range of services.

a) Optimism and embracing change

The ability to maintain optimism and embrace change emerged as a category of the adaptability and resilience sub-theme. Leaders who can cultivate hope, even in the face of uncertainty, and who exhibit a readiness to adapt to changing business landscapes are more likely to not only endure adversity, but to thrive in an ever-shifting marketplace (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2021; De Vries & Shields, 2006). Participant 8 stated that even when the future seemed uncertain, they held on to the belief that there is a brighter future ahead and that opportunities will eventually arise.

In trying to remain optimistic, even if there isn't any obvious reason to be optimistic, I think it's important to believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and that something will emerge. (Participant 8)

Moreover, Participants 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10 collectively reported how they were flexible and open to transformation during COVID-19. Participant 6, in particular, also mentioned that embracing change allowed them to re-evaluate their business strategy and prioritise services that were generating higher revenue.

We also need the tenacity to fight through it. (Participant 1)

So, we just need to learn to be adaptable to changes. (Participant 3)

The biggest lesson for me definitely it would have to be leaning more towards embracing change ... Once I learned to accept my fate so to speak as see things as they were, I found myself in a better mindset, which ultimately led to me surviving through this great difficult period. (Participant 4)

I would say that it's sort of like a blessing in disguise, in the sense that, you know, the pandemic had to happen for me to actually notice that actually with psychometric tests, I was wasting a lot of time with one client. Now I'm getting more clients in those four hours ... And honestly speaking, I feel that the transition to some extent, is actually cost effective ... Emotionally, we had to prepare ourselves that this is the new normal. And when we prepared emotionally, we were able to just survive each day as it came and hence, we are here today ... ultimately, I had to reason with myself and say, you know what, denial is not gonna help you in any way. You just have to go with the flow and start doing things this way, cause everybody's surviving doing things this way. (Participant 6)

I just needed to be more flexible. (Participant 8)

From a personality side, I think the fact that I'm flexible and I can deal with change, that helped. (Participant 10)

b) Making use of technology

The category of making use of technology implies that technology had a major impact in reshaping and adapting various aspects of work and life in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This category suggests that the private practices of psychological practitioners have harnessed technology to facilitate remote work, and the delivery of services using telepsychology. It signifies a shift toward leveraging digital tools and platforms to maintain productivity, connect with others, and address challenges brought about by the pandemic. Participant 8, for instance, shared an experience of working with a client who was instrumental in modifying some of the assessments which resulted in a favourable outcome. In addition, Participant 10 pointed out how the pandemic accelerated technological advancements, especially with working online and connecting with other across the African continent, and even globally.

Some assessments had to be modified, admittedly. But then they also worked out well. But I think you know that the client from Malawi was instrumental in helping with the adaptation, in terms of designing the assessments. (Participant 8)

I think on the positive side, is the technology. For me, I learned a lot about using different platforms, going the online route opened up the world, conducting interviews with people over the whole of Africa ... I would say COVID-19 pushed South Africa into those technological advancements and even the whole world. (Participant 10)

On the other hand, some participants, like Participants 1 and 6, articulated the limitations of virtual assessments, specifically in psycho-educational and psycho-motor skills evaluations. They emphasised that these assessments require in-person interactions to yield accurate results. Participant 6 took the decision to discontinue offering psycho-educational assessments due to their impracticality in a virtual context.

So, with this kind of assessment [psycho-motor assessments], there was no way of us administering it virtually. There was no way of instructing a candidate

from home because you needed a specific tool in administering those assessments. (Participant 1)

In terms of psychometric assessments [psycho-educational assessments], I personally stopped doing them completely because it doesn't make sense for me to assess a child virtually. It's not going to work when it comes to assessment, so I've never done a virtual assessment. (Participant 6)

c) Networking and marketing

This category represents the active efforts participants have undertaken to adapt to the changing professional landscape by maintaining a strong professional presence and continue attracting clients through networking and marketing, even in the face of unprecedented challenges. Participant 7 shared their success in advertising their practice on Google and gaining numerous referrals from it, and Participant 1 also reported on how they have maintained a strong online presence through having a website and using social media for their business as a means of resilience. Participants 8 and 9 also highlighted the importance of networking at reaching out to potential clients.

We have also updated our website. We have someone working on the social media front to update our different pages, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This is how we are remaining resilient ... we are really trying to have a presence. (Participant 1)

After the pandemic, I was just being pro-active and trying very hard to work on getting clients. (Participant 3)

I advertised on Google. Actually, my son helped me to advertise my practice, you know, and I got a whole lot of referrals from there. (Participant 7)

You have to network. (Participant 8)

I'm always reaching out to clients, to potential clients, and checking with them if there is potential for work. (Participant 9)

Furthermore, Participant 8 recognised that while networking may present challenges, they also acknowledged the importance of honing this skill.

It's been harder for me and you and I find it a little bit harder to network and start new relationships. But yeah, but that is also a skill that I realised I need to sort of sharpen more and more. (Participant 8)

d) Continuous learning and skill development

This category signifies the recognition that ongoing skill enhancement, remaining relevant and competitive in their respective fields are essential for adaptability and resilience in a constantly evolving environment, and as such continuous learning and skill development was identified. Continuous professional learning serves as the method by which individuals sustain their expertise and competencies within their respective professional domains (Collin et al., 2012; Srinivasacharlu, 2019). Similarly, Participants 3, 8, 10 emphasised the importance of continuous learning and skill development to remain updated, relevant, and competitive in their respective fields.

I think most people after studying, they become complacent, and they don't learn ... I feel like learning is a continuous process because things are continually being updated. (Participant 3)

And also, just to continue sharpening your skills and I'm trying to be relevant, to stay relevant in the market. (Participant 8)

I am busy with a course to diversify my business. (Participant 10)

e) Expanding the range of services

The last category that emerged under the sub-theme adaptability and resilience, was expanding the range of services. This category showed participants' willingness to diversify their offerings, tap into emerging opportunities, and meet the evolving needs of their clients. In the face of a rapidly changing professional landscape, Participant 1 has recognised the importance of not being confined to a limited scope of services but also included coaching into their portfolio. Participant 8 also shared the same

sentiments and further added counselling to their services. Participant 10 found it fitting to also work with individuals instead of only catering to businesses.

Don't depend on one client or on one sector ... I think the business remains resilient because we have recently refocused the business. Instead of only offering psychometrics and HR interventions, we have also included coaching to have a multi-focused solution for our clients. (Participant 1)

What I am learning, is that putting all your eggs in one kind of basket, for example, I did mainly in the assessment basket, probably not going to be the best thing for me, personally. Going forward, I need to really expand the coaching, I need to get more into coaching and more into counselling as well ... I'm also thinking of maybe going back to working with children. (Participant 8)

Focus more on individuals instead of only businesses, you know, enlarge the business. So, I think that will put me in a better position. So, if there's a pandemic again, I can focus on that part. Where businesses close down, people will still go on and need services that I will be able to do now. So, I think the lesson that I've learned is to prepare myself and to put things in place. (Participant 10)

Sub-theme 4: Future financial planning

The last sub-theme that emerged was that of future financial planning. It highlights the financial plans that should be followed to ensure that the business would be financially prepared for future dynamic changes such as a pandemic. The following categories were identified: (a) business savings, (b) adopting multi-income strategy, and (c) financial plans.

a) Business savings

It has become essential to safeguard and optimise one's financial resources in the face of challenging economic conditions, such as those triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. This category, business savings, consists of setting aside financial reserves and adopting cost-effective practices to reduce expenses, which ultimately build a financial buffer that can mitigate the potential effects of unexpected crises or economic

downturns. Participants 4 and 5 decided to cut back on unnecessary expenses such as having a full-time office space.

I focused cutting back on redundant expense, for example the need for a dedicated office space as that rental expense would now be freed up. By following that approach, limiting expenses, I was able to “free up” financial resources that could be used elsewhere such as equipment required for going virtual. (Participant 4)

We actually closed down some of the offices and if we need a physical office space, we rent on an hourly rate or even daily. We are cutting down on the expenses. (Participant 5)

A proactive approach in terms of saving for rainy days in preparation for the uncertainties of the future is required. Participant 6 suggested building a financial safety net by having at least three months' worth of savings as a precaution. Participant 8 echoed the sentiment and recommended at least six months' salary. Participant 7 continued to stress the role of savings in providing support during challenging times.

... to always prepare yourself like ahead of time. Like if something comes, at least one must actually have three months of savings. (Participant 6)

Always think about the future in terms of saving because we were helped by our savings as a family. (Participant 7)

What's at the back on my mind all the time, is trying to save, having to save, and put away something for a rainy day ... at least, like, six months' salary in savings, so that one can sustain oneself. (Participant 8)

b) Adopting a multi-income strategy

Entrepreneurs engage in a range of economic activities that extend beyond owning a single company. These activities include generating income from various channels such as a salary, passive income, and profits from additional business interests (Carter

et al., 2007). As such, adopting a multi-income strategy emerged as a category. Participants 1, 5, and 9 highlighted the importance of having various sources of income.

The lesson that we have learned is that it is important to have multiple income streams. (Participant 1)

It is the change in the mindset because remember now, the COVID-19 has taught us that, hey, putting your eggs in one basket is very dangerous. And so, as it stands now, we are trying to diversify, get into other businesses and not necessarily that as a psychometrist or medico-legal related. (Participant 5)

The one big lesson is to not put one's eggs in one basket. You know that one needs to have multiple income streams. You know you need various side hustles to keep you busy in case this one doesn't work. (Participant 9)

c) Financial plans

Within the sub-theme of future financial planning, participants emphasised the critical role of both government and private sector support during a pandemic, which led to the emergence of financial plans. Participant 5 highlighted the need for external financial assistance, such as loans or financial aid from the government, and Participant 6 suggested taking out a policy that would assist private practices during a financial drought. Participant 10 also expressed that having such financial support would have provided them with the flexibility to explore other opportunities, rather than restricting them to safe and predictable work for the sole purpose of meeting their basic financial needs.

3.5 Discussion

The general aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practices of psychological practitioners. The specific literature aims of the study were to gain insight into the impact of COVID-19 on the private practices of psychological practitioners, and furthermore, to identify and conceptualise the various initiatives that psychological practitioners have implemented

to protract their private practices and to remain competitive during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it aimed to understand and conceptualise the resilience and coping mechanisms employed by psychological practitioners in the context of their private practices.

The specific empirical aims were (a) to understand the operations of private practice of psychological practitioners before and after COVID-19; (b) to explore the psychological practitioners' perspectives of which private practice services were mostly impacted as result of the COVID-19 pandemic; (c) to explore how psychological practitioners protract their private practice and to remain to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic; and (d) to identify and formulate recommendations on resilient and coping strategies of psychological practitioners that can be implemented within their private practices for sustainability and future research.

Therefore, the discussion section interprets and explains the findings derived from the data analysis as reported above, and consists of an interpretation of the results, implications of the research, limitations, and suggestions as well as conclusions.

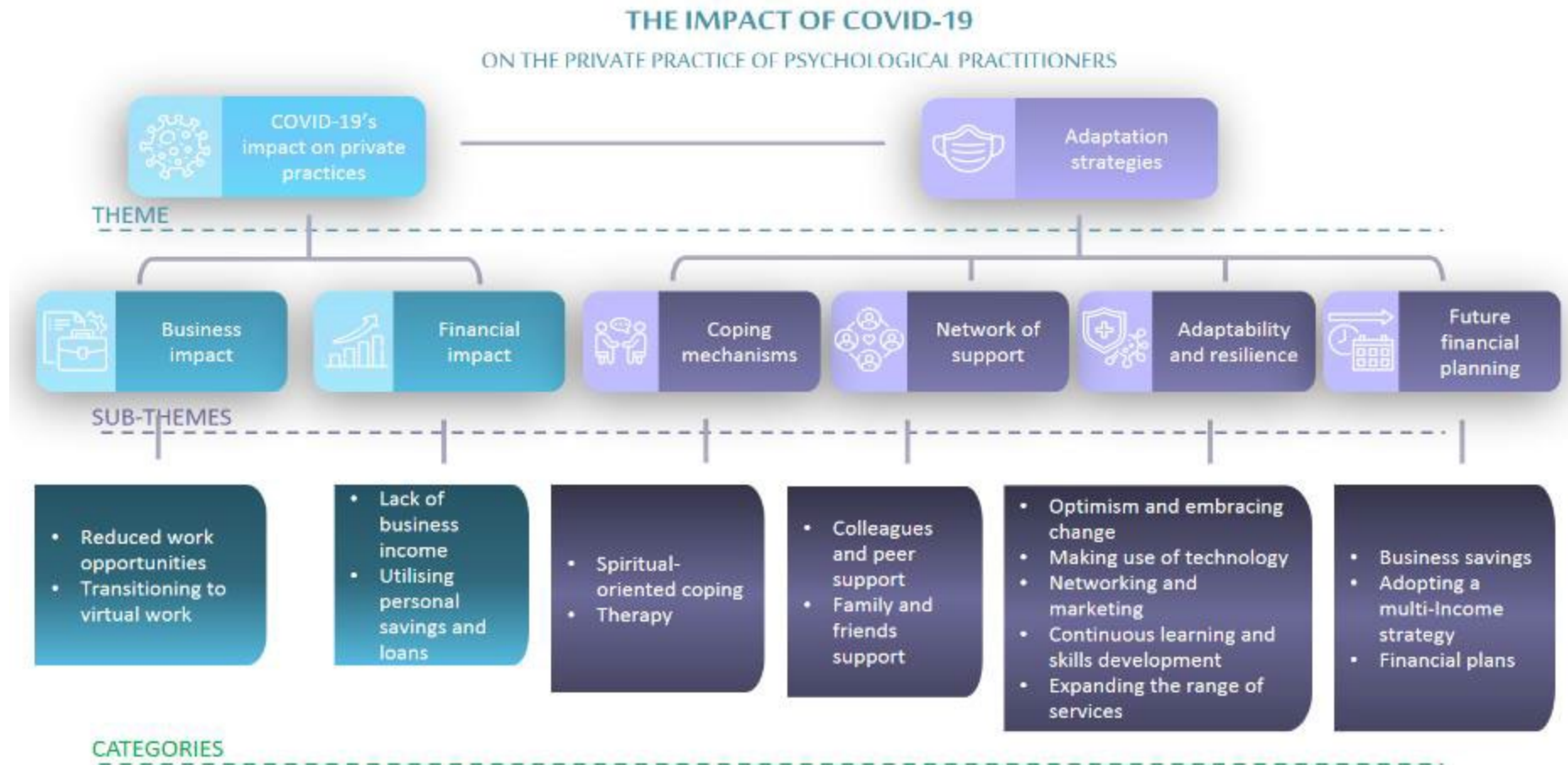
3.5.1 Interpretation of Findings

One of the prominent findings of this study is that COVID-19 had a drastic impact on the private practices of psychological practitioners. I will delve into the interpretative analysis of the results data and shed light on the impact the pandemic had on their private practices, the strategies they employed to remain competitive and ensure sustainability of their businesses. This study also has a pragmatic value as it offers strategies that psychological practitioners can use to ensure their businesses remain competitive and resilient during a pandemic or crisis.

From the 10 semi-structured interviews conducted, two themes were identified which represent the lived experiences of participants about the impact of COVID-19 on their private practices. Figure 3.3 depicts an overview of the themes, sub-themes, and categories of the study.

Figure 3.3

Overview of Themes, Sub-themes, and Categories



The challenges identified in this study correlate with the findings of Chowdhury et al. (2021) who stated that the pandemic has had a negative impact on various sectors. Many researchers reported on how many businesses across different fields and industries, such as tourism (Collins-Kreiner & Ram, 2021; Sigala, 2020), entertainment (Nhamo et al., 2020; Ryu & Cho, 2022), education (Le Grange, 2021; Sahu, 2020; Soudien et al., 2022), logistics and supply chain (Atayah et al., 2022; Beškovnik et al., 2022; Goel et al., 2021), and hospitality (Davahli et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020) have been affected. As such, this study adopted a focused approach to comprehend the unique implications of the COVID-19 pandemic within the field of psychology. The research sought to address the question: How does COVID-19 impact the private practice of psychological practitioners? This inquiry stemmed from the recognition that the consequences of the pandemic extend beyond the aforementioned sectors into the field of psychology.

Theme 1: COVID-19's impact on private practices

In terms of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practices of psychological practitioners, it was noted that it had an adverse impact. As such, COVID-19's impact was identified as the first main theme of the study. The empirical findings revealed that the psychologists' private practices were doing well prior to the pandemic. Evidence from the study showed glimpses of flourishing based on the growing client base and scope of work. Additionally, early indicators pointed towards an anticipated increase in workload, based on interactions with clients. However, this outlook shifted drastically following the onset of COVID-19. The sudden impact of the pandemic resulted in a struggle for survival, rather than the continued success participants had anticipated. It was reported that during hard lockdown, psychological practitioners experienced none to fewer work opportunities, resulting in reduced work when compared to before the pandemic. Most SMEs experienced major operational challenges due to a significant reduction in the demand for goods and services (Syriopoulos, 2020). The virus has caused a significant, immediate economic downturn, leading to the closure of numerous businesses (Sujová & Kupcák, 2024), regardless of their size, resulting in the unemployment of tens of millions of people, and impacting on various aspects of business operations (Engidaw, 2022).

As restrictions were lifted, some work opportunities were reportedly emerging, although not significantly. As work started coming in, a shift from conducting work from face-to-face sessions to virtual became imminent (Buchholz et al., 2020; Haque, 2020), and this was confirmed by all the participants. Psychologists used to conduct their sessions primarily in person. However, in response to the pandemic, they transitioned to telepsychology, and their attitudes also shifted positively, and they are ultimately becoming more receptive to this new way of working (Sampaio et al., 2021).

Most participants showed a favourable disposition toward telepsychology, but not everyone immediately embraced it due to the fear of losing a close connection with clients when adopting remote sessions. However, they had to adapt to the changes because of the lack of business opportunities. About 7.07% psychologists in clinical settings used telepsychology prior to the pandemic and this increased to 85.53% during the pandemic, with 67.32% of psychologists relying solely on telepsychology for all their clinical work (Pierce et al., 2021). Data revealed another participant's attempt to embrace virtual work; however, issues relating to connectivity and the inability to read non-verbal clues proved to be challenging, and as a result, the practitioner resorted to traditional face-to-face therapy. Despite the challenges and the significant shift in practice patterns during the pandemic, the landscape of telepsychology continued to evolve even after the pandemic subsided. Following the pandemic, the use of telepsychology is estimated to be at 34.96% (Pierce et al., 2021). There was a need to change from conducting psychometric assessments in person, and as a result, new approaches for conducting routine and structured procedures were modified to comply with lockdown protocols (Wigdorowitz et al., 2021). Similar considerations apply to coaching offerings, necessitating practitioners to take advantage of the growing online possibilities to mitigate the impact of potential future pandemics like COVID-19 (Passmore et al., 2023). Notably, psychologists across different registration categories have already begun incorporating telecommunication into their professional activities (Cooper et al., 2019).

Those who expressed concerns about virtual work reported challenges relating to reading body language (non-verbal communication) during online counselling and coaching sessions, as well as the need to adapt psycho-educational assessments to the new virtual format. These concerns are reaffirmed by literature that interpreting

non-verbal cues is a crucial component of counselling (Afdal, 2016; Hamersma & Mark, 1977; Mitzkovitz et al., 2022) and that these non-verbal signals remain hidden, and their absence can pose a disadvantage during the online counselling process (Poh Li et al., 2013). In terms of psycho-educational assessments, most psychological assessments available are standardised for in-person use (Mulligan & Ayoub, 2023).

Additionally, the other impact that was discovered in the study was the financial struggle and survival, implying that the lack of work opportunities translated to no income for the businesses, which put the participants under financial distress. Business owners who experienced temporary closures and managed to keep their enterprises afloat are likely to be affected significantly, as the financial setbacks incurred during the shutdown months are likely to have a lasting effect (Kalogiannidis, 2020).

Consequently, participants were compelled to rely on personal savings, financial support from their families and friends, and even resort to borrowing to endure the financial challenges brought by the pandemic. The declining revenues and capital necessitated SMEs to increase their borrowing (Beauregard et al., 2020; Gur et al., 2023; Yao & Liu, 2023). Such measures allowed psychological practitioners to maintain some financial stability of their private practices during this period. However, this also translated into a need to repay these loans, thus delaying the point at which they could begin realising their profits. For some, it was not until 2022 that their private practices fully recovered, both in terms of workload and revenue.

Theme 2: Adaptation strategies

This theme focused on adaptation strategies that psychological practitioners implemented after the business and financial impact they suffered due the pandemic. Drawing upon the conceptual integrative model developed by Hillmann and Guenther (2021), as explained extensively in the literature review, psychological practitioners in this study implemented adaptive tactics strategically to navigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic effectively while ensuring the sustainability of their private practices. In terms of resilient behaviour, study participants employed diverse mechanisms to confront the challenges posed by the pandemic. The findings revealed that the mobilisation of diverse coping methods by participants in response to

pandemic aligns with the view of coping strategies as ways to adjust when stressful situations go beyond a person's coping abilities, which then propels them to utilise coping strategies such as problem-focused (dealing with the source of stress) or emotion-focused (managing emotional reactions) (Kamble, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Schoenmakers et al., 2015). For example, problem-focused coping includes proactive coping, strategising, controlled coping, and inhibiting conflicting tasks, and emotion-focused coping includes viewing problems from a positive perspective, embracing reality, spiritual/religious orientation, comedy (Algorani & Gupta, 2023) and therapy (McLeod, 2023). In light of these classifications, this section focuses on coping mechanisms used by participants, which include religion, pursuit of solutions, and therapy. It was evident that some drew strength from their spiritual orientation and faith, while another participant sought creative solutions to address the crisis more effectively. Consulting a psychologist was also sought to help in regulating emotions and thinking. These methods are consistent with adaptive coping which is beneficial to one's health (Holton et al., 2016). Additionally, instances of denial were reported, skewing to avoidant-focused coping which is aimed at evading stress, either through social diversion, mental disengagement such as denial, or physically distancing oneself from the situation (Allen, 2021; Wu et al., 2020). One participant struggled to acknowledge the changes in the new way of working during lockdown, particularly in the counselling field. However, this participant eventually overcame this state of rejection upon realising that it was affecting the success of their business, particularly in terms of getting clients and revenue generation.

Resilient resources refer to internal and external relationships (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). The pivotal role played by nurturing and sustaining relationships with family and friends as an invaluable source of emotional support during trying times was important. Similarly, the findings revealed participants' mobilisation of their network of support (i.e. colleagues and peer support, family and friends support) as a resilience resource. This helps to strengthen a person's resilience and capacity to confront hardship effectively (O'Neil & Kruger, 2022). The significance of connecting with colleagues within the profession showed the importance of solidarity and the reassurance that they were not navigating the challenges in isolation. Moreover, some participants articulated a compelling need for increased visibility and proactive involvement of professional bodies such as HPCSA, SIOPSA, and PsySSA during pandemics, as

they could offer essential guidance and support to professionals struggling with the unique challenges of such crises. Notably, the empirical data pointed out that the pandemic presented an unprecedented opportunity to shine light on psychology as profession and showcasing the profession's invaluable role in addressing mental health needs and crisis within organisations during times of adversity.

In continuing to build resilience, it was important to remain positive that things would work out while embracing change, as evident in the empirical data. It was also important to embrace change and the changes that it brought, such as transitioning to tele-psychology. The study highlights that after the pandemic, psychological activities, including counselling and conducting assessments, were mostly virtual and that technological advancements brought about new ways of doing things. This statement is supported by Cooper et al. (2019), who reported that we are currently experiencing an unparalleled technological revolution that is affecting every facet of psychological practice, teaching, and research. Digital technologies have prevented numerous businesses from facing bankruptcy (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Klein & Todesco, 2021; Santos et al., 2023; Uvarova, 2021). There is still room to capitalise on technology by digitising assessments that are mainly performed face-to-face. Participants also emphasised the importance of networking and marketing to maintain their competitiveness. This involves promoting their businesses, interacting with clients, and consistently enhancing their skills, recognising the ever-evolving nature of the professional landscape. Social media pages and up-to-date business website were also reported as some of the solutions that assist in building presence and relevance.

Technology integration, particularly in marketing (digital marketing), is essential in business strategy (Alford & Page, 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Suherlan & Okombo, 2023; Trainor et al., 2011). Further underscoring this significance, research shows that the use of technology was found to be higher in SMEs and this correlates with heightened pandemic resilience and competitiveness (Mishrif & Khan, 2023; Saura et al., 2023). Moreover, continuous learning and skill development was seen as essential. Continuing Professional Development offers the advantage of preventing academic qualifications and practical skills from becoming obsolete, providing individuals with a continuous opportunity to enhance their abilities, whether they need to acquire new skills or update existing ones (Ahmed, 2019). Some participants

decided to enrol for courses and sharpen their skills during the pandemic which will ultimately assist in diversifying skills and ensuring sustainability.

Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that diversifying the range of services offered and establishing multiple income streams are of utmost importance. Participants are exploring working in different sectors, providing additional services and other opportunities outside of the field of psychology. This means that in addition to a core service, businesses should consider branching out into related areas or exploring new revenue-generating avenues. In the current dynamic and unpredictable business landscape, diversification has emerged as a driving force for gaining a competitive edge and fostering synergy in market activities (Oladimeji & Udosen, 2019). This strategic approach can help to enhance financial stability (Han et al., 2019) and resilience in a dynamic and ever-changing business environment (Snorek et al., 2023). It allows businesses to broaden market reach, secure a competitive edge, outperform competitors (Bachtiar, 2020) to long-term sustainability and success.

In terms of resilience capabilities, COVID-19 was unexpected and people across the globe had to make sense of what was happening. Grounded in sense-making theory, sense-making includes the social interaction between people and their environment, where they use their reasoning abilities to come up with actions that would modify circumstances to be favourable (Turner et al., 2023). It would seem from the study that the participants made sense of the pandemic and employed the above-mentioned strategies to ensure that their private practices thrive under these harsh conditions. Furthermore, future financial plans were suggested by ensuring that there is sufficient business savings that would last for a few months should they find themselves in a similar predicament and having an insurance policy specifically for such disasters. This is because anticipation plays a vital role in the preparation and execution of restorative measures following a shock, aiming to avoid future recurrences (Kaufman, 2012).

Hillmann and Guenther (2021) are of the view that resilient behaviour, resilient resources, and resilient capabilities serve as causal factors that impact a resilient response. The authors also adapted to the new way of working during lockdown which ensured that their recovery time was not prolonged. Participants used internal skills to come up with solutions to mitigate COVID-19 related challenges such as adapting to

the new way of working, making use of technology, networking and marketing, continuous learning, and skills development. On the other hand, the empirical data found that for those who did not capitalise on resilient strategies, their businesses did not survive the pandemic. The outcome of how an organisation reacts to adversity is its capacity for growth and knowledge acquisition (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). As such, the incorporation of the above-mentioned strategies is likely to ensure business resilience and growth.

In closing, the general findings of the study reveal that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic permeated extensively into the private practices of psychological practitioners, overturning traditional ways of working, limiting work opportunities and ultimately affecting the financial stability of the business. It also highlights the remarkable adaptability of both the practitioners and their practices. The robust strategies cultivated by practitioners in response to the crisis were reported, offering an instructive framework for resilience-building and recovery during a pandemic or other possible “black swan” events. Analysis of the research indicates that studies on SME resilience are mainly theoretical, with a scarcity of empirical data backing them up (Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023). This study is therefore essential as it offers real-world insights and concrete data on the resilience and competitiveness of SMEs, filling a significant gap in the current theory-dominated landscape.

3.5.2 Implication for practice

The study goes beyond merely recognising the challenges experienced by psychological practitioners in their private practices during the pandemic; it delves into the proactive strategies they adopted to maintain the competitiveness and sustainability of their businesses. This insight holds significant value, extending its applicability beyond the field of psychology. This is because it also offers a roadmap for resilience and adaptability that transcends disciplinary boundaries, making it a valuable source of knowledge. Entrepreneurs managing their own ventures can draw essential lessons from this research, making it a valuable resource for navigating unforeseen disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic and other potential “black swan” events in the future. The private practice’s ability to respond to a crisis with agility is

vital for its continuity (Brown et al., 2022; Margherita & Heikkilä, 2021; Mills & Keremah, 2020).

Furthermore, the study highlighted a pressing need for increased support and resources for the businesses of psychological practitioners to navigate challenges effectively. It also provided strategies that ensure that practices remain resilient and competitive during challenging times, such as those caused by the pandemic. Additionally, professional bodies such as HPCSA, SIOPSA and PsySSA ought to be visible and active in supporting psychological professionals during dynamic times. These associations could play a more dynamic role by creating forums for industrial psychologists to express themselves through offering support services and structures to aid these professionals during a pandemic (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). The support does not have to be strictly financial; it can encompass emotional support, serve as a beacon of hope, and actively participate in exploring emerging opportunities and their potential benefits for the field. Furthermore, a focus on careful financial planning and savings ensures long-term financial health. Considering today's economically uncertain business environment, attaining strategic financial goals and long-term stability requires an effective strategic financial management framework (Miahkykh et al., 2019). In the long run, the shock of the pandemic will likely increase business savings, leading more companies to save as a protective measure (Demary et al., 2021).

3.5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

There are some limitations that can be drawn from this study. Firstly, my beliefs, viewpoints, and experience as a psychological practitioner working in a colleague's private practice during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced my chosen topic. My biasness and personal experience relating to the topic influenced themes and sub-themes in the data analysis process; however, all the themes and sub-themes were constructed from the data where I gave voice to the participants by adding verbatim data (see findings section) and therefore the findings were co-constructed. Kalu and Bwalya (2017) and Morrow (2005) explain that the potential for bias enters the research initiative the moment a researcher chooses the topic, but that it is necessary to acknowledge any biases in the context of doing the research by means of reflexivity.

As such, my biases were managed through reflexivity, which refers to recognising the researcher's role in the research practice and allows the researcher to acknowledge their impact on both the research procedures and results (Haynes, 2012). Secondly, during the data collection process, interviews were conducted online, and this came with its challenges considering load-shedding and connectivity issues. This was managed through rescheduling. Lastly, as with most qualitative research, the study had a small sample size which valued exploring intricate details of the participants' lived experiences, and as such, it may limit the ability to make broad generalisations to a larger population.

In terms of suggestions for future research, there are several suggestions that could add value to existing literature and empirical research, such as conducting a series of investigations centred on the post-COVID-19 business performance in psychologists' private practices, with the potential for result comparisons. Future research may also involve understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the private practices of psychologists from a different perspective, that is, those who were granted essential worker status during lockdown and how this impacted on their work. It would also be intriguing to see how the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, in psychological practices can improve challenges in counselling, such as picking up on non-verbal cues, and ultimately, improve psychologist-client interaction.

3.6 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted businesses and economies worldwide (Chang, 2023; Echchabi et al., 2023, Nteka, 2023). This study sought to gain deeper insight into the lived experiences of psychological practitioners in private practice regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their practices. Using a qualitative approach grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants. Data were analysed through IPA. The findings revealed the substantial negative effects of the pandemic, stemming from limited business activity and inadequate financial resources. Regardless of its adverse impact on the economy and small businesses, it also created opportunities for restructuring that could expedite economic recovery (Jangjarat & Jewjinda, 2023). In essence, the

study explored two main themes: the impact of COVID-19 on private practices and the adaptation strategies employed. The first theme delved into the business and financial repercussions of the pandemic on private practices, leading to both operational and economic challenges. The second theme focused on adaptation strategies. These included coping mechanisms used to manage the pandemic's challenges, the importance of a support network during these times, the adaptability and resilience demonstrated by businesses in responding to the crisis, and the implementation of forward-thinking financial planning to prepare for future pandemics. These themes collectively provide a comprehensive overview of the pandemic's effects on private practices and the various strategies employed to navigate through these unprecedented times.

This research makes valuable empirical and practical contributions to psychological practitioners in private practice. It adds value to the existing COVID-19 literature by providing an in-depth perspective of psychological practitioners navigating the crisis. The study also offers a framework of adaptive tactics that can inform evidence-based guidelines to boost resilience and the sustainability of private practices during pandemics. It highlights the need for increased support systems and continued development opportunities to facilitate effective responses during a crisis. While insightful, this study had limitations typical of qualitative approaches, including a small sample size. Further research could involve larger samples, exploring the experiences of those who may have benefited from increased business opportunities during the pandemic, and post-pandemic analyses. Furthermore, exploring the integration of emerging technologies into psychological practices also holds promise. By continuing to build knowledge, industrial psychology can fulfil its vital role in supporting individuals, organisations, and society during global crises.

3.7 References

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Chapter 4: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

This chapter consists of the primary conclusions drawn in accordance with the study's objectives and aims. The limitations, contributions, and recommendations are also addressed.

4.1 Conclusions

The general aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners. This section provides an evaluation of the study's objectives with regards to the literature review and the empirical results.

4.1.1 Conclusions drawn from the literature review

The specific literature aims of the study were to:

- Conceptualise and understand COVID-19 as a construct in psychology.
- Understand the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners.
- Identify and conceptualise initiatives that psychological practitioners implement to protract their private practice and to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Understand and conceptualise the resilience and coping of psychological practitioners in their private practices.

The aforementioned literature aims are discussed thoroughly next.

4.1.1.1 Conceptualise and understand COVID-19 as a construct in psychology

In the latter part of December 2019, there were reports of a group of pneumonia cases with unknown origins. Shortly afterward, the identified cause of this pneumonia was determined to be a new type of coronavirus and this particular virus was provisionally labelled as SARS-CoV-2, and the associated illness was named coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (He et al., 2020). The virus initiated in bats and was transferred to humans through intermediary animals that are yet to be identified. It spreads between

people via inhalation of droplets from infected individuals or through contact with contaminated surfaces (Singhal, 2020). From its origin in Wuhan, China, the virus extended to many countries (Van Damme et al., 2020). It is reported that the virus had extended its reach to over 200 nations (Platto et al., 2020) and by March 2020, there were more than 800 000 infections and 40 000 confirmed cases of people who passed from contracting the virus (Ke et al., 2020). This number continued to increase as the virus spread fast, and on 11 March 2020, WHO declared it a worldwide pandemic (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). Leading to developed and underdeveloped countries being damaged and significantly impacted (Lone & Ahmad, 2020).

Due to how fast COVID-19 was spreading and the public health issues it came with, containment was critical to avoid the health care system from being overwhelmed as it could have led to higher mortality rates. As such, policies to flatten the curve and slow transmission were essential to ease the burden on hospitals (Canuto, 2020). These policies included closing down offices, limiting the size of gatherings, shutting down public transportation, requiring people to stay at home, restricting movement within a country, imposing controls on international travel (Xiu et al., 2022) and wearing masks (Tam et al., 2021). On the other hand, implementing these high levels of strict containment policies was not seen as the most effective way to control the spread and impact of pandemics like COVID-19 as it came with considerable societal and economic implications (Coccia, 2022). People were separated from their families, children and youth deprived of educational and social opportunities, businesses shut down, businesses went insolvent, and people went into poverty due to loss of livelihood (WHO, 2022b). Nonetheless, it was deemed necessary to manage the outbreak.

From a psychological perspective, while containment strategies may have slowed the fast spread of the virus, they took a psychological toll on people (Alqahtani et al., 2022; WHO, 2022b). Due to the high levels of uncertainty, various mental health issues and psychological consequences of the COVID-19 crisis such as worry, anxiety, depression, frustration, and suicidal ideation materialised (Alqahtani et al., 2022). It was also found that entrepreneurs' income decreased as their businesses were forced to close, further affecting their well-being, and causing high levels of anxiety (Li et al., 2022, Xu & Jia, 2021) and stress (Backman et al., 2021). This psychological dimension

underscores the intricate web of challenges posed by the COVID-19, demanding a holistic approach for recovery and support.

4.1.1.2 Understand the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners

The literature clearly demonstrates the immense disruptions COVID-19 lockdown delivered to business operations and finances globally (Alao & Gbolagade, 2020; Bartik et al., 2020; Du, et al., 2023; Fairlie & Fossen, 2021; Kalogiannidis, 2020; Moretto & Caniato, 2021; Pinzaru et al., 2020; Surya, 2022; Veselovská, 2020). While SMEs and big companies were negatively affected by the pandemic (Engidaw, 2022), small enterprises are among those most severely impacted (Birinci & Amburgey, 2022; Baker & Judge, 2020; Sujová & Kupcák, 2024). Private practices of psychological practitioners, as small businesses relying on face-to-face client contact, faced comparable challenges to their businesses.

Studies found 59% declines in psychologists' caseloads in the USA (Sammons et al., 2020) and many of them in private practices experienced pay reduction (Marra et al., 2020) while others working for one major US health network were retrenched (APA, 2020). Some psychological assessments were paused (APA, 2020). In addition to this, Drysdale (2020) found immense mental health service disruptions in 93% of surveyed countries, in areas such as, counselling/therapy availability (67% disruptions), emergency treatment (35%), medication access (30%), and school/organisational services (75% partially disrupted). As such, the private practice of psychological practitioners was also not spared from the economic fallout and practice disruptions stemming from COVID-19 public health measures.

It was necessary for patients and practitioners to adapt creatively to maintain the delivery and receipt of psychological services, all the while reducing the risk of exposure to, or spreading the virus (Alqahtani et al., 2021). In response to the negative impact and challenges brought forth by the pandemic, psychological practitioners had to transition from face-to-face interactions (Alqahtani et al., 2021; Applelton et al., 2023) to telehealth/telepsychology (AlRasheed et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2022; Sampaio et al., 2021).

Whilst there are issues relating to ethical guidelines (Evans, 2018), price of data as well as limited privacy and confidentiality, specifically in South Africa (Goldschmidt et al., 2021), recent findings show that conducting virtual sessions as a viable, secure, and efficient approach in South Africa (Rabe, 2022). Pierce et al. (2021) reports on the amount of services delivered virtually telepsychology skyrocketing from 7.07% pre-pandemic to 85.53% during the pandemic. This review provides insights on COVID-19's multifaceted impacts on the private practice of psychological practitioners.

4.1.1.3 Identify and conceptualise initiatives that psychological practitioners implement to protract their private practice and to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the increased significance of strong leadership and it has served as a global test of leadership capabilities (Olkowicz & Jarosik-Michalak, 2022). The enhancement of leadership, which is a crucial organisational asset, can promote resilience, benefiting both the employees and the organisation itself (Prayag et al., 2023). This is because the leader is constantly responsible for the many challenges in a dynamic work environment (Southwick et al., 2017). Herrman et al. (2011) identify three key factors contributing to resilience in leaders. Firstly, personal attributes like one's personality traits, sense of control, abilities, thought patterns, self-assurance, and mind-set significantly influence resilience. Secondly, biological elements such as changes in the brain's stress response and ability to regulate emotions also impact resilience building. Finally, environmental, and systemic factors like having a robust support network and community are vital for bolstering resilience. These factors collectively influence how leaders respond to challenges, thereby benefiting their businesses and ultimately building competitiveness and resilience.

Kazozcu (2011) emphasises the importance of strategic flexibility in enabling companies to navigate and recover from crises effectively. This flexibility, coupled with agility, allows businesses to smoothly transition between strategies and adopt a proactive approach. According to Cingöz and Akdoğan (2013), such proactivity enhances a company's ability to assess its environment, spotting opportunities and

threats better than their competitors. Awais et al. (2023) also highlights that strategic flexibility not only aids in crisis management but also drives organisational innovation, leading to improved performance outcomes.

SMEs or private practices need to be innovative for them to recover their market share (Zutshi et al., 2021). Many businesses have avoided bankruptcy by using new technologies as it represents one of the options that assist entrepreneurs with adaptability and business redesign. New technologies have helped many organisations become more resilient while avoiding bankruptcy (Santos et al., 2023). Analytics, large data, cloud technology and social and mobile platforms are some of the opportunities that businesses use to compete better in the market (Nkwankpa & Roumani, 2016). Due to the pandemic, video-based services and some telephone services are expected to be used more in the future because they are seen as easy to use and beneficial. If companies fail to take on such opportunities, then they risk being left behind by competitors and possibly shutting down as shown by Kodak (Pereira et al., 2022).

Similar to psychological practitioners, Gicas et al. (2020) report that psychological assessments have reached a crucial junction of either persisting with traditional methodologies or embracing a transformational change by leveraging recent technological advances. Studies show various solutions used by practitioners who embraced technology during the pandemic. For instance, psychologists conducted assessments and therapy remotely using videoconferencing (Oudshoorn et al., 2021) and both practitioners and clients found the virtual experience satisfactory (Martínez-Cengotitabengoa et al., 2022). Psychological practitioners basically took advantage of telehealth (Farrer et al., 2022) or telepsychology (Haddouk et al., 2023). Additionally, digital transformation can assist with HR processes by using cloud computing to improve real-time visibility of performance management (Al-Rwaidan et al., 2023). For psychologists focused on organisational effectiveness, analytics and AI will provide insights on strategic HR issues while self-help services and digital assistants support operational tasks (DiRomualdo et al., 2018). AI tools like ChatGPT can provide the automation of routine HR functions like selection, performance management, employee on-boarding, development, and compliance (Marr, 2023).

Although virtual psychological services introduce various opportunities, some challenges remain regarding its implementation include technological challenges by the clients (Breton et al., 2021), lacking the financial means to purchase data or internet connectivity devices (Watson et al., 2023), privacy issues (Cassity-Caywood et al., 2023; Stepanova et al., 2024) and validity of remote psychometric tests (Gicas et al., 2020). As such, psychologists would still need to find ways to navigate these challenges as the shift to telepsychology and virtual psychological services accelerates.

4.1.1.4 Understand and conceptualise the resilience and coping of psychological practitioners in their private practices

Research on resilience shows that it is a growing field although its definition remains debated (Duchek, 2019). While conceptualisations vary, the common theme emphasise resilience adapting in the face of change. Vella and Pai (2019) recognise resilience as a key positive psychology construct. According to Ledesma (2014) and Vella and Pai (2019), resilience can be seen the ability to bounce back. Aguirre (2006, p. 1) refers to resilience as “physical, biological, personality, social, and cultural systems' capability to effectively absorb, respond, and recover from an internally or externally induced set of extraordinary demands”. Aldianto et al. (2021) emphasise business resilience as adapting to changes in the environment while Walker (2020) adds that a resilient system modifies itself and its interaction and functioning in response to disruptions without altering the system itself. As such, being a learning system, it is better equipped to effectively manage future disturbances.

COVID-19 has brought to light the importance of business resilience (Barton et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021), as companies have had to deal with major disruptions to daily operations and processes (Sakurai & Chughtai, 2020). Given the dynamic nature of business environments, it is crucial for companies to build the capacity to thrive in such constantly evolving settings (Robb, 2000).

As such, the Theoretical Model of Organisational Resilience model Xiao and Cao (2017) conceptualises resilience from across individual, group, and organisational levels. On an individual level, employees are encouraged to cultivate a positive attitude

to help the business to build and develop resilience. Group level is where setbacks are viewed as opportunities for learning and growth and lastly an organisational level, the model is seen create a structure that would adapt to business disturbances, improvising, and being attentive to failure. By cultivating resilience capacities across multiple levels, organisations including the private practice of psychological practitioners can flexibly adapt to ever-changing conditions. This integrated perspective provides a framework for understanding and enhancing resilience in volatile business environments.

Furthermore, the concept of coping is explored in the literature review, but it's crucial to first understand stress, the driving force behind coping. Williams (1985, p. 11) regards stress as the psychological and mental condition psychological condition marked by feelings of “fear, frustration, anxiety, anger, uncertainty, pressure, conflict, tension, or emotional distress” triggered by the presence of one or more situations (stressors) that are perceived by the individual as possibly jeopardising their well-being. Aschbacher et al. (2013) observed that stress can be beneficial, potentially enhancing performance and resilience. However, when stress surpasses manageable levels (Vasumathi et al., 2003), it can become problematic, leading to physical and psychological issues which is why coping is essential in managing stress effectively (Khosla, 2006). Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) define coping as the cognitive and behavioural strategies employed to handle the internal and external challenges of situations perceived as stressful. Self-employed person's life is filled with stress (Beattie et al., 2023; Getahun et al., 2023; Kurimay et al., 2017; Nelson & Sutton, 1990; Newton, 1989) and COVID-19 was one of the contributing factors of stress as they were at forefront of it (Kipkosgei, 2022). This is because it affected their businesses (Eib & Bernhard-Oettel, 2023). Psychological practitioners working in private practice can also be regarded as entrepreneurs.

Coping styles are the various methods individuals use to manage stress (Algorani & Gupta, 2022) and there are three primary types of coping styles identified by Higgins and Endler (1995), namely: emotion-oriented, task-oriented, and avoidance-oriented. During the COVID-19 pandemic, St-Jean and Tremblay (2023) found that task-oriented and avoidance-oriented coping strategies were crucial for entrepreneurs' well-being and effective in reducing stress, whereas emotion-oriented coping tended

to exacerbate stress. On the other hand, Olore et al. (2023) discovered that task and emotion-oriented coping strategies are most effective. Similarly, Kulip et al. (2022) advocate for the use of emotion-oriented coping, particularly in managing emotions to alleviate COVID-19 related fears. By integrating the Broaden-and-Build theory proposed by Fredrickson (2001) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987), a deeper insight into the role of positive emotions in enhancing effective coping mechanisms when dealing with stressors was achieved, offering a more comprehensive understanding of emotional dynamics in stress management. As such, supporting individuals such as psychological practitioners in private practices to effectively manage challenging situations like the pandemic can enhance their overall well-being and encourage innovative thinking despite the adversities encountered.

4.1.2 Conclusions drawn from the empirical study

The specific empirical aims of the study were to:

- Understand the operations of private practice of psychological practitioners before and after COVID-19.
- Explore the psychological practitioners' perspective of which private practice services were mostly affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Explore how psychological practitioners protracted their private practice to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Identify and formulate recommendations on resilient and coping strategies of psychological practitioners that can be implemented within their private practices for sustainability.

The findings of this study validate and support the conclusions previously derived from the literature, as outlined above, and the empirical aims are further elaborated in the subsequent discussion.

4.1.2.1 Understand the operations of private practice of psychological practitioners before and after COVID-19

The study highlighted that psychological practitioners mostly conducted their services face-to-face prior to the pandemic. Psychological assessments were predominantly conducted in-person (August & Mashegoane, 2021; Krach et al., 2020; Mulligan & Ayoub, 2023). This is because some were normed for such a format (Mulligan & Ayoub, 2023) and are not suitable for adapting, transforming, or distributing remotely (Wigdorowitz et al., 2021). Similarly, majority of practitioners also engaged in client-facing psychotherapy sessions pre-pandemic (Sampaio et al., 2021).

As a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions, psychological practitioners had to quickly adjust to telepsychology (Barnett et al., 2023; Hames et al., 2020; Mills et al., 2021; Shklarski et al., 2021). Initially, concerns with remote work relating to forming emotional bonds, interruptions during sessions, client confidentiality, and maintaining professional limits were reported (Békés et al., 2021). Other concerns included the inability to read non-verbal communication (Poh Li et al., 2013). Despite these issues, practitioners continue to work remotely in their private practices post-COVID-19 (Barnett et al., 2023). The study reveals that most psychological practitioners are embracing the new way of working and that their businesses are steadily improving from where they were during lockdown. The rapid shift to telepsychology represents a long-term change in the operations of private psychological practice. It is a feasible alternative set to increase significantly in the coming years (Cavallo et al., 2023).

4.1.2.2 Explore the psychological practitioners' perspective of which private practice services were mostly affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

Initially, the participants of the study were mostly unable to work, with most of their services affected. In particular, services typically conducted in-person were unable to continue, consistent with broader research indicating assessments normed for in-person administration could not be adapted for remote delivery (Mulligan & Ayoub, 2023; Wigdorowitz et al., 2021). Specific assessments identified in the empirical study that were adversely affected included psycho-educational and psycho-motor assessments as they require face-to-face interaction.

For example, the traditional administration of the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test relies on clients' hand drawing designs which are then scored for accuracy and integration. This scoring is typically done manually. A recent study by Fathi Ahmadsaraei et al. (2023) adapted this assessment for online remote delivery by developing a computerised version with standardised stimuli presentation and incorporating automatic scoring. They found promising evidence with high accuracy. This demonstrates how advancing technology now allows certain assessments reliant on physical materials and in-person interactions to be adapted effectively for telepsychology formats, increasing accessibility. Additionally, services relying on travel such as psycho-legal consultations were halted, although documentation such as report writing continued from home where possible.

4.1.2.3 Explore how psychological practitioners protracted their private practice to remain competitive during the COVID-19 pandemic

The empirical findings showed that psychological practitioners employed various adaptation strategies, to be discussed in section 4.1.2.4, which enabled them to sustain and protract the competitive of their private practices despite COVID-19 disruptions. As the two aims were closely interrelated, it was determined that separating the conclusions was unnecessary and would substantially duplicate content.

4.1.2.4 Identify and formulate recommendations on resilient and coping strategies of psychological practitioners that can be implemented within their private practices for sustainability

The study revealed several key strategies utilised by psychological practitioners to sustain their competitive private practices during the COVID-19 crisis. A business' capacity to adjust, react, and bounce back has become not just an advantage but an essential requirement (Napier et al., 2024). These adaptive tactics were identified, and Table 4.1 provides an overview.

Table 4.1*Overview of adaptive strategies*

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Adaptation strategies	Coping mechanisms	Spiritual-oriented coping
		Therapy
	Network of support	Colleagues and peer support
		Family and friends support
	Adaptability and resilience	Optimism and embracing change
		Making use of technology
		Networking and marketing
		Continuous learning and skills development
		Expanding the range of services
	Future financial planning	Business savings
		Adopting a multi-income strategy
		Financial plans

In terms of coping mechanisms, psychological practitioners leveraged spirituality and faith as an orienting force during difficult times. During crises, including the pandemic, people often seek solace and understanding through religion/spirituality (Bentzen, 2020) to help them cope during these difficult and taxing situations (Leonhardt et al., 2023). Seeking personal therapy also helped regulate emotions and thinking for some. Relying on one's network of support came up as essential in the study. Technology enabled individuals to maintain connection with their friends and families despite the distance (Hall et al., 2021; Heshmat & Neustaedter, 2021). Connecting with colleagues

and peer groups also provided reassurance. Additionally, displaying adaptability and resilience emerged as vital for the private practice of psychological practitioners in response to pandemic adversity. Leaders' adept at fostering hope amidst uncertainty and willingness to adapt are more inclined to prosper in a constantly changing market (Akinbinu & Chiloane-Phetla, 2021; De Vries & Shields, 2006). This also included integrating digital technologies in their business for operational continuity (Datta & Nwankpa, 2021; Fitriasisari, 2020; Margherita et al., 2021; Mishrif & Khan, 2023; Sujová & Kupcák, 2024), persisting with networking and marketing as it helped the business to thrive (Dhameria et al., 2021; Kappel, 2020), sustaining one's expertise and competencies through continuous learning (Collin et al., 2012; Srinivasacharlu, 2019) as well as expanding service offerings helped to diversify services and tap into new opportunities. Identifying and cultivating emerging prospects is central to the essence of entrepreneurship (Tang et al., 2012). Furthermore, the empirical findings highlighted future-oriented financial planning as a strategy crucial for ensuring financial stability in unpredictable circumstances, such as a pandemic. Psychological practitioners realised the importance of business savings to bolster resilience should unpredictable events take place (Cowling et al., 2020). It was found important to only focus on private practices but to rather develop multi-income strategy which may include salary, passive income, and profits from additional business interests (Carter et al., 2007). Moreover, the formulation of emergency funds from government for businesses, insurance policies, and any other financial plans would equip practices to endure periods of hardship more smoothly. These proactive financial tactics allow private practices to "future-proof" their financial standing and minimise financial impact similar to what was experienced during lockdown.

Overall, psychological practitioners displayed commendable resilience and competitiveness in response to the business and financial turmoil triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. By continuing to implement the adaptive strategies uncovered in this study, private practices can strengthen their ability to withstand and thrive in the face of future adversities. The field demonstrated flexibility which will enable them to continue serving their clients even in times of instability.

4.1.3 Suppositions resulting from the empirical study

The following supposition were obtained from the empirical study.

The pandemic drastically affected the private practices of psychological practitioners in terms of business opportunities and financially, causing a major shift from demonstrating great potential for flourishing with growing client bases to struggling for survival. This aligns with broader research indicating widespread negative impacts of the pandemic across various sectors.

The study showed the necessity to transition from in-person to virtual sessions/telepsychology due to pandemic restrictions as a significant adaptation. This change, while initially challenging due to issues like connectivity and non-verbal communication barriers, eventually became more accepted and integrated into private practices. This applies to psychological assessments as well, however, there is still an opportunity to adapt some of the assessment virtually.

Various adaptation strategies employed by psychological practitioners were crucial for ensuring the competitiveness, sustainability, and growth of their private practices during and after the pandemic turmoil. These include utilising effective coping mechanisms, marshalling a network of support, displaying adaptability and being resilient, and prioritising future-oriented financial planning. The study underlines the importance of resilient behaviour, resources, and capabilities in responding to crises. Practitioners who adapted effectively to the new conditions fared better, demonstrating the necessity of resilience in their businesses. The pandemic accelerated the integration of technology in psychological practices, suggesting a continued evolution in how services are delivered. This shift indicates a growing need for the digitisation of services post-pandemic.

4.2 Limitations

This section discusses limitations from both the literature review and empirical study.

4.2.1 Limitations of the literature review

According to Ross and Zaidi (2019), every research has its own set of constraints. Similarly, this study also had some limitations that should be considered. My personal experience working closely with a psychological practitioner during the COVID-19 pandemic informed my interest and choice of research topic. This pre-existing involvement may have introduced the potential for inherent biases to shape the research analysis and findings, and subsequently influencing the themes that emerged. However, to minimise bias, I ensured the findings were firmly rooted in the interview data itself. Providing verbatim quotes directly from the participants and reflexivity methods were crucial so their voices and experiences shaped the co-constructed themes. My goal was to consciously separate my own lens from the analytic process so that the themes surfaced from the participants outwards rather than projecting inward based on my subjectivity. Every researcher should proactively identify any areas of bias that could distort research findings and institute measures that could steer away from to reduce or minimise the deviation from factual truth (Šimundić, 2013).

In addition, while there is a wealth of research exploring the impact of COVID-19 on various businesses and sectors, there is a notable limited data specifically addressing the adverse effects of the pandemic on the private practices and businesses of psychological practitioners.

4.2.2 Limitations of the empirical study

Virtual interviewing was selected as the qualitative data collection method due to continued COVID-19 public health restrictions. This method came with its challenges resulting from load-shedding and connectivity issues leading to delays. Nonetheless, this occasionally necessitated the postponement and rescheduling of discussions.

Another notable limitation of this research is that while early data shows some recovery and adaptation amongst private practices of psychological practitioners, the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the timeline for full recovery remain uncertain. However, engaging in a longitudinal research characterised by trends over an extended timeframe, falls outside the scope and objectives of the current study.

Moreover, the in-depth, qualitative approach focused on detailing the lived experiences of participants but this limited the participant sample size. Due to the intensive nature of qualitative research, the number of participants involved in the study was relatively small (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023; Hammarberg et al., 2016). As a result, the findings, while highly insightful and context-specific, cannot be readily generalised to a broader population or extrapolated to larger demographic groups. It is important to acknowledge that the strength of this study lies in its depth rather than breadth, emphasising a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of the selected participants.

4.3 Contributions

This section presents the contributions of this study to the researcher, organisations, and psychological practitioners.

4.3.1 Contributions of the findings to the researcher

The study offered the researcher valuable insight into how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted operations and financially threatened the private practices of psychological practitioners. It showed the unique challenges faced by practitioners in this field, thereby enhancing the researcher's understanding of the direct and indirect impacts of global crises on small businesses. This awareness has led to a deeper appreciation of the nuances involved in managing a private practice during times of widespread uncertainty and stress.

The findings of this study not only enriched the researcher's academic knowledge but also provided practical lessons on resilience, adaptability, and the holistic management of private practices during a crisis. This enhanced understanding is

instrumental for the researcher's future role as an Industrial and Organisational Psychologist who intends to have an own business.

4.3.2 Contribution of the findings to organisations

The economic fallout from the pandemic spotlights the existential threats unpredictable crises pose for businesses of all sizes. The findings of this study carry substantial implications for organisations and entrepreneurs, shedding light on the invaluable lessons that can be drawn from the tumultuous events, such as COVID-19. These lessons extend far beyond the immediate crisis and have implications for long-term organisational resilience and adaptability.

First and foremost, the study underscores the critical imperative for organisations to recognise the existential threat posed by cataclysmic events. Often, businesses can become complacent, operating under the assumption that they are immune to unforeseen disruptions. However, the abruptness and severity of such crises, as exemplified by COVID-19 pandemic, serve as a stark reminder that preparedness is not a luxury but a necessity. It is therefore essential to implement contingency plans even during periods of growth.

These plans should encompass various facets of an organisation's operations, including business continuity, financial reserves, and marketing, amongst other things. This can build a framework that allows for swift responses in times of crisis. This agility is paramount for not only weathering the storm but also for seizing opportunities that may arise amidst the chaos. Another positive finding was that adversity also drives innovation out of necessity. The ability to quickly shift resources, embrace remote work, adopt digital transformation can make the difference between survival and collapse. Mishrif and Khan (2023) are of the view that SMEs that leveraged technology adoption and digitisation demonstrated greater resilience during the COVID-19 crisis and they were also more inclined to embrace the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).

4.3.3 Contribution of the findings to psychological practitioners

The study bring awareness to psychological practitioners about how disruptive events can negatively affect business operations and finances. This knowledge is crucial for preparing for and mitigating the impacts of similar events in the future. Additionally, the study provides invaluable insights for psychological practitioners, which can guide them in enhancing the resilience and sustainability of their practices. The resilient adaptive responses displayed by participants offer fellow practitioners an impactful framework of agility comprising of telepsychology adoption, effective coping mechanisms, support structure, embracing technology, networking and marketing, skills development, and financial buffers for the future. Leveraging these crisis mitigation tactics can strengthen one's ability to operate through and rebound from periods of constraint.

In addition to crisis response insights, a key contribution from the findings is spotlighting the increasing necessity for psychological practitioners to cultivate entrepreneurial and technological skills. Having entrepreneurial versatility to see new opportunities, ideate revenue streams from diverse services and multiple ventures, online presence became essential for the continuity of business in a digital environment. Those who could not strategically adapt were left financially bereft even with their otherwise robust professional training. By developing entrepreneurial-minded leaders and boosting their skills is important to enhance economic growth (Ngigi et al., 2018). This emphasises entrepreneurship fluency as crucial. Furthermore, the relevance of technological proficiency and adaptation for psychological practitioners, as they navigate the evolving landscape of virtual work and platforms. By becoming better equipped and more competent in serving their clients digitally, they not only enhance their ability to provide effective services but also position themselves for a smoother transition and greater adaptability in the 4IR.

By understanding the pandemic's multi-faceted business and practitioners' resilience-based responses, IOPs can enrich their crisis and change management skillset for better supporting organisations and staff through "black swan" events, preventing crises from becoming existential threats. They may assist with:

- Facilitating sensemaking amongst leadership and employees when rapid, unexpected changes unfold so that productive mindsets can be cultivated.
- Guiding transitional solutions such as digitisation to maintain delivery channels amidst constraints.
- Designing communication and change management frameworks that preemptively address uncertainties and counterproductive behaviours like presenteeism, fear, uncertainty or disengagement that often accompany major disturbances.
- Moreover, their expertise in areas such as organisational behaviour, leadership development, and employee well-being positions IOPs as valuable resources for companies seeking to navigate turbulent times. By offering evidence-based insights, and targeted interventions, IOPs can help organisations foster resilience and adaptability among their leadership, teams and workforce in general.

The research also highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in professional practice. By learning from the pandemic responses within psychological practice, IOPs can pay forward these crisis governance strategies more broadly to different organisations, industries, and sectors.

Additionally, as practitioners felt isolated dealing with the pandemic's professional impact themselves, professional bodies such as SIOPSA should expand peer support infrastructure to empower resilience and effective coping mechanisms. They can serve as knowledge hubs and platforms for the exchange of best practices, research findings, and strategies for organisational resilience. SIOPSA and similar bodies should take the initiative to support IOPs in their efforts to identify opportunities amidst disruptions. This empowerment can take various forms, including offering training and resources on crisis management, remote work strategies, and the application of technology within the workplace. By equipping IOPs with the necessary tools and knowledge, these societies can ensure that their members are well-prepared to assist themselves and businesses in not only surviving but thriving in the face of uncertainty and disruptive events. This collaborative effort between IOPs and professional bodies is instrumental in fostering resilience, innovation, and sustainable growth within the ever-evolving landscape of industrial and organisational psychology.

4.4 Recommendations

This section outlines the recommendations that have derived from the results of the study.

4.4.1 Application of the findings to organisational practice

Organisations should continuously monitor technological advancements in their respective industries and invest in digital capabilities, infrastructure, and skills training to enable flexibility and alternative delivery channels if needed to navigate constraints. The abrupt shift to telepsychology and virtual service delivery methods during pandemic restrictions highlighted the growing importance of technologies. Given the modern technology landscape, leveraging digital innovations can strengthen efficiency, customer satisfaction, and make decisions which will ensure the competitiveness of small businesses (Sukrat & Leeraphong, 2023). Furthermore, as AI, social networks, gaming, and other innovations become more ingrained in daily life, psychologists are being called upon to drive critical research that promotes healthy, ethical adoption of transformative technologies across society (Straight & Abrams, 2024).

To facilitate this evolution, specific recommendations include the establishment of digital academies or training programs offering short courses on technology and its relevance to psychology. These initiatives should be seamlessly integrated into continuous professional development, given that the world is currently in the midst of the 4IR, necessitating a digital transformation in certain psychological services. Psychological practitioners already possess valuable professional expertise, and augmenting this knowledge with technological proficiency will undoubtedly propel the field forward while also ensuring that offerings are in line with the current times. It is also essential for organisations to develop financial buffers, control expenditures and model different economic scenarios to evaluate and strengthen the organization's financial health to operate temporarily at reduced capacity.

Finally, in an ever-changing work environment with potential uncertainties, it is crucial for organisations to build an agile and resilient workforce. An agile business has the strategic foresight and flexibility to capitalise on market prospects and tackle potential

threats with haste. This approach would enable businesses to adapt quickly to changes and challenges, ensuring sustained performance and competitive advantage (Holbeche, 2019).

4.4.2 Recommendation for future literature reviews and empirical studies

This section outlines recommendations for future research.

Since this study focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners which was negative due to their limited opportunities to work, it would be interesting to see the other side of the coin, which involves exploring the effects of COVID-19 on psychologists who were designated as essential workers during lockdowns and its impact on their practice.

Conducting a series of studies focusing on the post-COVID-19 business performance in psychologists' private practices could enable result comparisons. Additionally, it would be beneficial to examine how the integration of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality can enhance psychological practices, particularly in improving non-verbal cue detection and enhancing client-psychologist interactions.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarised the key conclusions derived from the study's findings, addressed the limitations, and provided recommendations for future research. The objective of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners. The study revealed the extent and scope of COVID-19 disruption across psychological private practices which includes restrictions affecting in-person services, loss of revenue and business opportunities during lockdowns. The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting economic lockdowns caused a significant disruption to businesses globally and had a profound impact on the world economy (Bhattacharyya & Thakre, 2021; Naseer et al., 2023). However, despite multi-faceted challenges their businesses experienced, psychological practitioners displayed remarkable resilience through crisis adaptation solutions which ensured their competitiveness and sustainability. Overall, by revealing

the spectrum of pandemic effects, this research aims to empower psychological professionals, entrepreneurs, and businesses in proactively fortifying their ability to navigate inevitable future disruption through crises readiness strategies modelled in the findings.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet

Ethics clearance reference number: 2022_CEMS/IOP_025

31 October 2022

Title: Participant information and Informed Consent Form

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Katlego Kungwane, and I am doing research with Prof. Rudolph Oosthuizen, a Professor and Dr. Linda Steyn, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology towards a Master of Commerce in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled:

The impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners: A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective.
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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to find out how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected businesses, specifically the private practice of psychological practitioners.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen to participate in the study because you are a psychological practitioner working in private practice. Your contact details were obtained from MN Psychological Consulting, which is an organisation acting as my gatekeeper. You have been invited because you have given permission to the above-mentioned organisation to be contacted by me.

The reason you have been invited is because you are a psychological practitioner who has experienced your private practice being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and furthermore, who showed a willingness to participate in the study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves recorded semi-structured interviews and the participant will be required to have their video switched on. The duration of the study is at least 60 minutes.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participation in this study is voluntary and the participant may withdraw from the process at any time at no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Should you decide to participate, you will be required to sign a written consent form.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The study is of beneficial to psychological practitioners in private practice and those who plan to work in private practices in the future. The study will also contribute to the body of knowledge on the impact of coping and resilience on the private practice of psychological practitioners. The study can further be used by organisations, psychological practitioners and future psychological practitioners who have been impacted by COVID-19 currently or any other pandemics that may be experienced in the future.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The study is unlikely to cause any harm to the participants. Should minor inconveniences or discomfort occur, contingency measures such as professional counselling by my supervisors will be taken.

Furthermore, all participants' information will be kept confidential to ensure that the participants are not identifiable.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The researcher will take the necessary measures to ensure the identity of the participant remains confidential.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Additionally, those who will have access to the data collected, i.e. transcriber, will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement and he/she will receive the information with pseudonyms using a code number.

Participants' anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Their privacy will be protected in any publication of the information.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

All electronic copies will be stored on the researcher's laptop with an encrypted password that is only known to the researcher. Data saved on the cloud will also be password protected. The information collected from this study will be stored by the researcher for a minimum period of five years on the computer and/or cloud. Thereafter, all electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the computer and cloud using a data deletion software/application. For future use of the stored data, the researcher will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No payment or reward will be offered to the participants of the study. It is, however, noted that interviews to be conducted will require data since they will be online and as a result, the researcher will incur data costs. Data will be sent to the participants and cash will not be offered.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS) Research Committee, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Katlego Kungwane on 083 561 8364 or 58054928@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for five years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact 083 561 8364 and/or 58054928@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Professor Rudolf Oosthuizen on 012 429 8245 or oosthrm@unisa.ac.za or Dr. Linda Steyn on 012 429 3794 or steynl3@unisa.ac.za.

Alternatively, you can contact the CEMS Research Ethics and Integrity Advisor if you have any concerns:

Dr Marianne Engelbrecht

engelm1@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



Katlego Kungwane

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research 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.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

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 agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature..... Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher's signature..... Date.....

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The semi-structured interviews were divided into four stages, i.e., preparing to conduct the interviews, the initial stage of preparing the participant, interview itself and the final stage. These stages are summarised as follows:

Stages	Descriptions
Stage 1: Preparing to conduct the interviews	Preparing for the interview with participants and reminding myself to be cognisance and observant of any signs of distress. It was beneficial to have a counsellor on stand-by should any adverse event occur
Stage 2: The initial stage of preparing the participant	This stage included establishing rapport and making the participants feel at ease. Participants were informed about their rights as participants in the research; the purpose of the interview, reason for their selection; anticipated duration of the interview; that consent must be of their own free will and that if they feel uncomfortable at any point in the interview, they should notify me.
Stage 3: Interview itself	In this stage the open-ended questions were asked to the psychological practitioners in private practice: 3.1 How was your practice doing before COVID-19? 3.2 How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your private practice? 3.3 Is there any difference in how your practice is operating now and after the pandemic? 3.4 Any other impact that you have noticed because of the pandemic? 3.5 How did you and your organisation cope with the changes that arose as a result of the pandemic? 3.6 Could you explain the mechanisms that you employed to ensure the sustainability of your private practice?

	3.7 What is the lesson learned as a psychological practitioner in private practice about a pandemic? 3.8 What kind of support is essential in ensuring the sustainability of private practice during a pandemic? Frequent pauses will be allowed in-between interviews to ask the participant if they were still fine to continue with the interview.
Stage 4: Final stage	In the final stage the interview is concluded by asking the participants if they would like to add anything. The participants were also be asked if they feel they need to speak to a professional counsellor as a result of perhaps reliving certain experiences that might have been discussed during the interviews. None of the participants required the services of a Professional Counsellor. However, contingencies were put in place should one have required counselling. Participants would have been referred to Professor Rudolf Oosthuizen 012 429 8245 or 082 402 9397 and the Cipla SADAG Mental Health Line (0800 4567 789 or WhatsApp 076 88 22 775).

Appendix C: Ethical Clearance



UNISA CEMS/IOP RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

31 October 2022

Dear Ms., Katlego Anestina Kungwane,

Decision: Ethics approval from
31 October 2022 to 31 October
2025

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)
ERC Reference # : **2022/CEMS/IOP/025**
Name : Katlego Anestina Kungwane
Student # : 58054928
Staff # : N/a

Researcher(s): Name: Ms. Katlego Anestina Kungwane
Address: 372 Block D, Mabopane, 0190
E-mail address, telephone: 58054928@mylife.unisa.ac.za, 0835618364

Supervisor (s): Name: Prof Rudolf Machiel Oosthuizen
Address: Unisa, Muckleneuk Campus, Preller Street, Pretoria, 0003
E-mail address, telephone: oostrm@unisa.ac.za, 0124298245

The impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners: A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective.

Qualification: Masters (MCom)- Post graduate degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa CEMS/IOP Research Ethics Review Committee for the above-mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for **Three** years.

The low-risk application was reviewed by the CEMS/IOP Research Ethics Review Committee on the 26th October 2022 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision was approved on 26th October 2022.

The proposed research may only commence with the provision that:



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Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

1. **The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa COVID-19 Position Statement on research ethics dated 26 June 2020 which is attached.**
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.
3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Unisa CEMS/IOP Research Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. **No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (31 October 2025)**
8. Submission of a complete research ethics progress report will constitute an application for the renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2022_CEMS/IOP_025** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

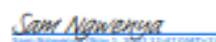


Signature

Acting Chair of IOP ERC

E-mail : tebelc@unisa.ac.za

Tel: (012) 429-8809

Signature

Acting Executive Dean : CEMS

E-mail: Ngwenms@unisa.ac.za

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Appendix D: Coding Sheet

Interview_Data_Analysis Coding Sheet - Excel (Product Activation Failed)

Study: The impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners					
Number	Questions	Codes	Page	Participant	Notes
13 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	hit hard	P.2 Line 71	P2	Impact of COVID-19
14 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	disappointment	P.2 Line 74	P2	
15 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	business never continued as usual	P.2 Line 74-75	P2	
16 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	no money	P.2 Line 77	P2	
17 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	really affected my private practice	P.2 Line 103	P2	
18 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	gatvol	P.2 Line 106	P2	
19 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	gave up	P.2 Line 110	P2	
20 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	business had paused	P.1 Line 32	P3	
21 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	no activity	P.1 Line 33	P3	
22 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	no work	P.1 Line 46	P3	
23 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	everything paused	P.1 Line 48	P3	
24 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	no services rendered	P.1 Line 49	P3	
25 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	things were slow	P.2 Line 74	P3	
26 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	had to reduce the numbers	P.2 Line 82	P3	
27 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	difficult period	P.1 Line 23	P4	
28 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	nothing positive came to fruition	P.1 Line 30	P4	
29 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	projects... made redundant	P.2 Line 41	P4	
30 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	not doing anything, , not getting paid, not get a penny, difficult	P.2 Line 48	P5	
31 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	take some loans	P.2 Line 68	P5	
32 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	wasn't easy	P.2 Line 69	P5	
33 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	financial burden	P.3 Line 102	P5	
34 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	had to close shop	P.2 Line 50	P6	
35 Q2	How did the pandemic affect your private practice?	no income	P.2 Line 51	P6	

Appendix E: Turnitin Report

TO	Examiners
CC	Prof. Rudolph oosthuizen & Dr. Linda Steyn
FROM	Katlego Kungwane, Student number: 58054928
DATE	19 February 2024
SUBJECT	Turnitin Originality Report

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 19-Feb-2024 15:52 SAST
ID: 2298762673
Word Count: 41073
Submitted: 1

Final Research By K A KUNGWANE

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<https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/1225/dissertation.pdf.txt?sequence=2>
- < 1% match (Internet from 21-Nov-2022)
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Appendix F: Editor's Declaration



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Private Bag X9
QUEENSWOOD
0121

Cellular: 083 269 0757
E-mail: monicabo@iantic.net

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that I have edited and proofread the dissertation entitled

**The impact of COVID-19 on the private practice of psychological practitioners:
A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective**

prepared by Ms Katlego Kungwane submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Commerce in the subject Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa, according to the specifications of the University, where available, and the latest standards for language editing and technical (computer-based) layout.

Editing was restricted to language usage and spelling, consistency, formatting and the style of referencing. No structural writing of any content was undertaken.

As an editor I am not responsible for detecting any content that may constitute plagiarism.

To the best of my knowledge, all references have been provided in the prescribed format.

I am not accountable for any changes made to this dissertation by the author or any other party after the date of my edit.

Electronically signed (actual signature withheld for security reasons)

MONICA BOTHA

29 January 2024

Sole Proprietor: Monica Botha

*Business Planning Corporate Systems Engineering Corporate Document Standards
Business and Academic Document Technical and Language Editing*