

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE STREET VENDORS
DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS IN THE EASTERN CAPE
PROVINCE**

by

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February 2026

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I declare that *The Lived Experiences of Female Street Vendors During COVID-19 Restrictions in the Eastern Cape Province* is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated or acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that I have submitted the dissertation to originality-checking software.



Signature _____

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28 February 2026

Date

DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR

I declare that the dissertation has been submitted to originality checking software:



Signature: _____

Dr E.M.C. Tabane

28 February 2026

Date

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research paper to my participants and to all
the street vendors in South Africa.

You are seen by me!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation represents not only an academic milestone but also a deeply personal journey marked by growth, perseverance and faith.

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Cily Tabane; thank you for going far beyond what was expected of you. Your patience, empathy and consistent encouragement carried me through moments when this journey felt overwhelming, both academically and personally. You not only supervised this study; you helped make this degree a reality for me. I will always be grateful for your support.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The pandemic and subsequent restrictions significantly disrupted the informal economy, placing female street vendors in a position of economic vulnerability and psychosocial strain. Drawing on Feminist Theory, Informal Economy Theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, this qualitative study examines how inequalities and economic precarity intersected with the health crisis to shape the experiences of female vendors. A constructivist paradigm and phenomenological qualitative design were adopted. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. The findings reveal that profound economic disruption, heightened caregiving burdens, fear of infection and psychological distress, alongside evidence of resilience, adaptive coping strategies and reliance on community and faith-based support systems. The study concludes that while female street vendors demonstrated considerable resilience, structural vulnerabilities exacerbated their distress. Recommendations are offered for gender-sensitive psychosocial interventions, community-based support structures and policy reforms to strengthen protection for informal workers during future crises.

Key Concepts: COVID-19 Pandemic, COVID-19 restrictions, Coping Mechanisms, Informal Sector, Female Street Vendor.

Sishwankathelo (IsiXhosa)

Olu phononongo luhlola amava aphilwayo kunye neendlela zokumelana neemeko ezinzima ezasetyenziswa ngabafazi abathengisa ezitalatweni kwiPhondo leMpuma Koloni ngexesha lezithintelo zokuvalwa kwelizwe ezabangelwa ngubhubhane we-COVID-19. Ubhubhane kunye nezithintelo ezalandelayo zaphazamisa kakhulu uqoqosho olungekho sikweni, nto leyo eyabeka abafazi abathengisa ezitalatweni kwimeko yobuthathaka kwezoqoqosho kunye noxinzelelo lwengqondo nentlalo.

Olu phononongo, olusekelwe kwiThiyori yeFeminism, iThiyori yoQoqosho oluNgacwangciswanga (*Informal Sector Theory*), kunye neModeli yoXinzelelo neNdlela zokuLumelana nalo kaLazarus noFolkman (*Transactional Model of Stress and Coping*), luhlolisise indlela ukungalingani kwezentlalo kunye nokungaqiniseki kwezoqoqosho okwadibana ngayo nengxaki yezempilo yoluntu ekubumbeni amava abafazi abathengisa ezitalatweni.

Kwakusetyenziswa ipharadayim ye-constructivism kunye noyilo lophando olusemgangathweni lwe-phenomenology. Idatha yaqokelelwa kusetyenziswa udliwano-ndlebe olucwangciswe ngokuyinxenye (*semi-structured interviews*) olwenziwa ubuso ngobuso, yaza yahlalutywa kusetyenziswa uhlalutyo lwemixholo (*thematic analysis*).

Iziphumo zophando zibonise ukuphazamiseka okukhulu kwezoqoqosho, ukwanda koxanduva lokunyamekela iintsapho, uloyiko lokusuleleka yi-COVID-19, kunye noxinzelelo lwengqondo. Kwangaxeshanye, iziphumo zikwabonise ukomelela kwabathathi-nxaxheba, ukusetyenziswa kweendlela ezahlukeneyo zokumelana neemeko ezinzima, kunye nokuxhomekeka kwinkxaso evela eluntwini nakwiinkqubo ezisekelwe elukholweni.

Olu phononongo luggqibe kwelokuba, nangona abafazi abathengisa ezitalatweni babonakalise ukomelela okubonakalayo, ubuthathaka obukhoyo kwezentlalo noqoqosho bandise ngakumbi uxinzelelo abajongene nalo. Ngenxa yoko, kuphakanyiswa ukuphunyezwa kongenelelo lwengqondo nentlalo oluthathela ingqalelo isini, ukomelezwa kweenkqubo zenkxaso ezisekelwe eluntwini, kunye

nohlaziyo lwemigaqo-nkqubo eya kuthi iqinise ukhuseleko lwabasebenzi boqoqosho olungekho sikweni ngexesha leengxaki ezinokuthi zenzeke kwixesha elizayo.

Amagama angundoqo: Ubhubhane we-COVID-19; izithintelo ze-COVID-19; iindlela zokumelana neemeko ezinzima; uqoqosho olungekho sikweni; abafazi abathengisa ezitalatweni

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
SRD	Social Relief of Distress
UNISA	University of South Africa
WHO	World Health Organisation

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CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic affected countries worldwide, disrupting political, social and economic systems (Aduhene & Osei-Asibey, 2021). The pandemic originated in China and spread to different continents worldwide (Chazovachii, 2020). South Africa recorded its first case on the 5th of March 2020, and the president declared a national state of disaster a few weeks later (Kowa, Cima, Mukasi, 2022). Strict restrictions were imposed on South African citizens, including deferring in-person interactions, restricting remote work, and prohibiting all recreational activities, including tourism and travel (Torres et al., 2023). The pandemic affected many vulnerable groups and sectors, especially the informal sector, poor households and more specifically, women (Tshikovhi & Cele, 2023).

The informal sector is a long-standing one and has helped produce income for many households (Tshikovhi & Cele, 2023). Studies reveal that restrictions imposed during the lockdown severely impacted informal traders, who relied on public spaces and human interaction for survival (Duong, 2018; Langill, Nguyen & Turner, 2021). Many street vendors lost their source of income as tourism and local markets were shut down, forcing them to adjust their business strategies from serving tourists to targeting residents (Langill et al., 2021). Women street vendors were particularly vulnerable, as the pandemic intensified the economic, physical and emotional stresses they already experienced due to gender inequalities (Langill et al., 2021).

Female street vendors in South Africa face numerous challenges, including safety concerns, theft, gender-based violence, harassment from authorities and lack of storage or sanitation facilities (Langill et al., 2021; Legodi & Kanjere, 2015; Ngomane, 2020). The COVID-19 lockdowns exacerbated these difficulties. During alert levels four and five, vendors were prohibited from trading in public spaces such as taxi ranks, railway stations and markets (Counted et al., 2020). Many lost their main source of income and struggled to provide food for their families (Ainamani, Gumisiriza & Rukundo, 2020). Although informal traders play a critical role in the country's food security, decision-makers often fail to consider their needs during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Wegerif, 2020).

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Globally, informal trade plays a vital role in supporting livelihoods, especially among women in developing countries. The informal sector helps provide work opportunities for a large population of South Africans who are unable to find formal employment (Tshikovhi & Cele, 2023). This sector is a vulnerable sector because it relies on daily earnings to ensure survival (Tshikovhi & Cele, 2023). Women are considered the main actors in this sector (the Informal Sector) due to limited education, restricted economic opportunities and of access to resources (Arsene et al, 2020). The flexibility of street vending enables women to earn an income while managing household responsibilities, such as childcare (Arsene et al., 2020). Research further indicates that informal trading contributes significantly to national economic job creation and helps women provide for their families (Chant & Pedwell, 2008; Chen, 2001; Sassen, Galvan & Duncan, 2018). Despite its importance, women street vendors across the world face unsafe working conditions, gender-based harassment and a lack of institutional support (Omotosho & Ola, 2021).

In the South African context, unemployment remains one of the most pressing social and economic challenges, with rates reported as high as 29% (StatsSA, 2019). Of a working-age population of 38.4 million, only 23 million are formally employed (StatsSA, 2019). Consequently, many South Africans turn to informal work, including street vending, as a source of livelihood (Forkour, Akuoko & Yeboah, 2017). Street vending contributes substantially to the economy, generating up to 32 billion ZAR and playing a key role in ensuring food accessibility, particularly in low-income communities (Gamielien & van Niekerk, 2017; Sassen et al., 2018). Vendors make food more accessible by selling near residential areas and workplaces and offering goods in flexible quantities at affordable prices (Wegerif, 2020).

While various studies examine the economic contributions of informal traders and the challenges that they face nationwide, limited research has focused specifically on the experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors in smaller urban areas during the COVID-19 lockdown. Addressing this gap is essential to understanding how these women navigate livelihood insecurity under crisis conditions.

Therefore, this study explored the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors in Mthatha during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic generated widespread insecurity and stress concerning livelihoods (Mogaji, 2020). Financial disruptions result in uncertainty about meeting basic needs and maintaining household stability (Mogaji, 2020). Street vendors, who depend on daily income, are particularly affected. Extended unemployment and uncertainty about future work opportunities heighten their anxiety (Mogaji, 2020). Economic pressures, such as large family responsibilities, have also been associated with higher levels of depression (Admas et al., 2021).

Street vending is commonly associated with social and economic vulnerabilities, including low income, poor housing and limited access to healthcare. Because their trade is primarily survivalist, vendors cannot afford to quarantine, exposing them to infection risks while trying to sustain their families (Admas et al., 2021). These challenges, combined with a lack of social support, contribute to heightened stress and potential mental health disturbances. The instability of income and livelihood has been linked to mental health risks such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks and post-traumatic stress (Cortés-Alvarez, Lamas & Vuelvas-Olmos, 2020). Additionally, reliance on industries affected by crises has been shown to cause psychological distress (Cortés-Alvarez et al., 2020). During lockdowns, households faced increased expenditures, and many vendors were forced to rely on government aid or loans, exacerbating financial vulnerability (Kaur, Ramachandran & Nanda, 2020).

Female street vendors remain an under-researched group. Limited attention has been given to the impact of the pandemic on their livelihoods and mental well-being, creating a gap in how mental health professionals, psychologists and social workers can provide effective post-pandemic support. Without understanding their specific needs and coping mechanisms, interventions risk being inadequate or irrelevant. This study, therefore, sought to explore the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown, with the aim of informing more effective mental health and social support interventions.

Street vendors have long been marginalised due to the perception that their work contributes little to the formal economy (Handoyo & Setiawan, 2018). Female street vendors experience further marginalisation due to persistent gender inequality in South Africa (Chipunza, 2018). They are particularly vulnerable to harassment, theft and confiscation of goods by authorities, as well as other forms of violence (Esayas & Mulugeta, 2020). They are 'contained' by authorities through imposing zoning codes

(Chibango, 2024), persecution, regulation and if they fail to adhere to these regulations, they are harassed through the confiscation of goods and harassment (Chibango, 2024)

The lockdown exacerbates these challenges by cutting off their income and exposing them to heightened economic and psychological strain. Despite this, many return to their stalls after restrictions ease, demonstrating resilience and determination. Understanding how they cope during such crises is crucial, as effective coping mechanisms are essential for mental well-being and recovery.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study required a theoretical framework that would explain why the research problem exists (Pardede, 2018). The study was guided by Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which conceptualises stress as arising from the interaction between an individual and their environment and emphasises appraisal and coping responses (Biggs, Brough, & Drummond, 2017). Within this model, individuals evaluate environmental events as threatening, harmful or challenging and stress emerges when the event is appraised as exceeding available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Coping responses are then mobilised to reduce distress and manage the situation.

The model distinguishes between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Baqutayan, 2015). Problem-focused coping refers to active strategies aimed at changing the stressor or its consequences, whereas emotion-focused coping involves strategies aimed at regulating emotional responses to the stressor (Baqutayan, 2015). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described problem-focused strategies as confrontive coping, seeking social support and planful problem solving, and emotion-focused strategies as self-control, distancing, positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility and escape/avoidance.

The COVID-19 pandemic was understood as a significant environmental stressor that disrupted income generation, threatened food security and increased uncertainty for an already economically vulnerable group. The framework was relevant to this study because it enabled an exploration of how female street vendors appraised the pandemic and the lockdown restrictions and how they coped with disruptions to livelihood, heightened risk and psychosocial strain.

1.3.1 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory informed this study by foregrounding how gender shapes lived experience, power relations and inequality. Feminist scholars argue that women's experiences are not merely individual occurrences but are socially produced and structured by broader systems of patriarchy, economic marginalisation and unequal access to resources and protection (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2000; Tong & Botts, 2018). From this perspective, gender is understood as a social construct embedded in power relations that influence women's access to economic opportunity, safety and decision-making power.

In the context of this study, feminist theory supported an understanding that female street vendors faced layered vulnerabilities due to gendered expectations and structural inequality. Women's participation in street vending cannot be analysed separately from their socially constructed responsibilities, including caregiving and household management. Feminist scholars have consistently argued that women disproportionately carry reproductive labour responsibilities, including childcare, domestic labour and emotional caregiving, often without remuneration or institutional recognition (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012). This 'double burden' places women at a structural disadvantage, particularly in precarious economic contexts.

Female street vendors may also experience heightened exposure to harassment, exploitation and gender-based violence risks in public trading spaces. Public economic activity does not occur in neutral environments; rather, it unfolds within patriarchal systems that shape women's safety and bargaining power (Agarwal, 1997; Chen, 2012). Limited protection mechanisms, informal trading conditions and weak regulatory enforcement may further reduce women's economic security and negotiating capacity.

This theoretical lens helped the study interpret how COVID-19 lockdown restrictions amplified pre-existing gendered inequalities. School closures and increased domestic demands intensified women's household burdens. Simultaneously, restrictions disrupted income generation, thereby compounding economic precarity. Feminist theory enabled the study to interpret participants' experiences not as isolated hardships but as outcomes shaped by intersecting social, economic and gendered structural conditions (Crenshaw, 1989). The theory thus provided a critical framework

for understanding how inequality, risk and responsibility interacted during the crisis period.

1.3.2 Informal Sector Framework

An informal sector framework informed the study by explaining the structural position of street vending within the broader economic system. The informal economy is generally defined as economic activity that operates outside formal regulation, taxation systems and institutional labour protections, yet contributes significantly to livelihoods and local economies (Chen, 2012; International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2018). Informal workers typically have limited access to labour rights, social security, unemployment insurance and stable income.

Within this framework, street vending is understood as a livelihood strategy shaped by structural unemployment, poverty and constrained access to formal employment opportunities, rather than purely as an entrepreneurial preference (Chen, 2012). In many developing and post-colonial contexts, the informal economy serves as a critical survival mechanism, absorbing individuals excluded from formal labour markets.

This framework was particularly relevant in understanding the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on informal workers. Informal traders often depend on daily earnings to meet immediate household needs, thereby increasing their vulnerability to sudden economic disruptions (ILO, 2020). When lockdown measures restricted public movement, there were losses without the compensatory protections available to many formal workers.

The informal sector framework assisted in identifying reasons that lockdown restrictions had severe consequences for participants' food security, debt vulnerability and psychosocial wellbeing. The absence of stable income limited social protection, and exclusion from formal safety nets compounded vulnerability. Thus, the framework located individual hardship within systemic economic precarity and institutional exclusion.

1.3.3 Integration of the Frameworks in this Study

This study integrated the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, feminist theory, and the informal sector framework to strengthen the interpretation of participants' lived experiences.

The Transactional Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1999) explained how female street vendors appraised the lockdown restrictions and the coping strategies they employed in response to livelihood disruption. It clarified how stress emerged through cognitive appraisal processes and how coping was influenced by available resources.

Feminist theory provided a gendered analysis of how women's lived experiences were shaped by structural inequality, gendered responsibility and vulnerability to exploitation. It enabled the study to interpret caregiving burdens, exposure to public risk and reduced bargaining power within economic systems as manifestations of systemic gender inequality rather than individual circumstance.

The informal sector framework located street vending within structural economic vulnerability. It explained why disruptions such as lockdown restrictions a disproportionate impact on informal workers had who lack labour protections, stable incomes and institutional safeguards.

Together, these frameworks provided a multi-level lens for analysis. The informal sector framework explained structural economic vulnerability, feminist theory illuminated gendered dimensions of inequality, and the Transactional Model clarified psychological appraisal and coping processes. This integrated approach ensured that participants' experiences were interpreted within both structural and psychosocial contexts.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The announcement of the South African COVID-19 lockdown was sudden, giving street vendors little time to sell their remaining stock. As a result, some street vendors were left with perishable and non-perishable goods that could not be sold before restrictions were finances. Financial hardship made it difficult for individuals to support their families and to cope effectively, particularly when the stressor was beyond their control. A perceived lack of control has been identified as a key factor in the stressor–strain relationship and has been associated with increased depressive symptoms (Batinic & Selenko, 2011).

The COVID-19 pandemic created insecurity and distress regarding livelihoods (Mogaji, 2020). It brought financial disruptions and uncertainty about the ability to pay

bills and meet basic needs such as purchasing food (Mogaji, 2020). Female street vendors faced these challenges as restrictions threatened their ability to provide for their families. This anxiety was intensified by prolonged unemployment and uncertainty about whether economic participation would resume once restrictions were lifted (Mogaji, 2020). Evidence had further shown that household economic pressures - often intensified by large family responsibilities - were significantly associated with depression (Admas et al., 2021).

Street vending has also been linked to social disparities and structural vulnerabilities such as low earnings, limited access to health services and poor housing. Because street vending often serves as a survival strategy, many informal workers could not afford to quarantine and were required to continue working despite health risks, thereby increasing their susceptibility to illness (Admas et al., 2021). Street vendors, therefore, experienced dual pressures: ongoing economic instability and the risk of infection, both of which could contribute to mental health disturbances. This heightened risk has been linked to limited social support and increased family burden (Admas et al., 2021).

Uncertainty about livelihood and financial security has been associated with compromised mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, panic symptoms and post-traumatic stress-related difficulties (Cortés-Alvarez et al., 2020). Additional research indicated that reliance on industries facing crisis conditions has been related to psychological distress (Cortés-Alvarez et al., 2020). Kaur et al. (2020) similarly reported increased household grocery expenditures during job losses, forcing many households to rely on government support and loans. Such financial vulnerability may exacerbate existing hardships or lead to new psychosocial difficulties, such as family conflict and emotional distress.

Female street vendors represent a historically marginalised group and limited research has examined how the pandemic affected their lived realities and coping processes. This gap limited guidance for psychologists, social workers and psychosocial services seeking to support this population after the pandemic. Without understanding the specific needs and coping resources of female street vendors, mental health providers risk offering support that does not align with their lived concerns; for example, interventions that overlook pandemic-related trauma exposure, persistent anxiety about future livelihood insecurity or context-specific coping needs. The study therefore

explored the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown.

1.4.1 The Research Questions

The main research question was: *What were the experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?*

The main research question necessitated the development of sub-questions:

1. What coping mechanisms did female street vendors use during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?
2. What challenges were experienced by female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during the lockdown restrictions?
3. What psychosocial support did female street vendors require from professionals when in distress?
4. What conclusions could be drawn from the coping strategies utilised by female street vendors?
5. What recommendations could be made for psychosocial interventions to empower and support female street vendors?

1.4.2 Aim and Objectives

The main aim of the study is to explore the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The study thus aimed to generate contextually grounded insights that could assist psychologists, social workers, and other psychosocial professionals in developing appropriate, culturally sensitive, and needs-based support interventions for female street vendors.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the experiences of female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.
2. To identify challenges experienced by female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.
3. To establish coping mechanisms utilised by female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

4. To determine the psychosocial support needs of female street vendors from professionals when in distress.
5. To draw conclusions regarding coping strategies used by female street vendors.
6. To offer recommendations for psychosocial interventions to strengthen coping capacities among female street vendors.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the specific procedures followed in the execution of this research study (Patel & Patel, 2019). The subsections that follow provide an overview of the research design, approach and strategy adopted for the study. Patel and Patel (2019) emphasise that researchers should clearly articulate the logistical procedures they intend to implement when operationalising the study design. Accordingly, this section presents the research paradigm, study approach and research design as well as the methods that guided the research process.

1.5.1 Research Paradigm

The study was located within a constructivist paradigm, which holds that individuals construct meaning and knowledge through lived experience and reflection (O'Connor, Carpenter & Coughlan, 2018; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This paradigm was appropriate because participants had directly experienced the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, and the study sought to understand the meanings they attributed to this phenomenon.

Constructivism recognises processes such as assimilation and accommodation in meaning-making. Accommodation involves adjusting mental frameworks to incorporate new experiences, while assimilation involves interpreting new experiences through existing frameworks (De Freitas, 2016). In this study, participants were encouraged to describe their own experiences and interpretations of the lockdown restrictions rather than being guided toward predetermined assumptions.

1.5.2 Study Approach

A qualitative research approach was used, as it enabled exploration of 'how', 'why', and 'what' questions related to a phenomenon and facilitated understanding of meanings participants attributed to their experiences (Asenahabi, 2019; Haven & Van

Grootel, 2019). A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to obtain rich narrative accounts of lived experience and coping.

1.5.3 Research Design

The study adopted a phenomenological research design. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore and interpret the lived experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, the research aimed to generate in-depth, contextually grounded accounts of participants' subjective realities within a specific socio-economic setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology is concerned with exploring how individuals experience and make meaning of a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It prioritizes participants' descriptions of their experiences and seeks to uncover common themes that capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the phenomenon was the experience of livelihood disruption, emotional strain, and coping among female street vendors during the pandemic.

A phenomenological design was particularly suitable because the study aimed to foreground participants' voices and interpret how stress and uncertainty were experienced within structurally constrained environments. This aligns with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which emphasizes that stress is shaped by individual appraisal processes and available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Within this framework, understanding subjective meaning-making becomes central to analyzing responses to crisis.

Qualitative phenomenology is also appropriate when examining socially marginalized populations whose experiences are often underrepresented in formal research (Neubauer et al., 2019). By using semi-structured interviews, the study enabled participants to articulate their realities in their own terms, thereby generating rich, nuanced descriptions. The design therefore allowed for a layered understanding of coping processes situated within broader systems of gendered economic vulnerability and informal sector marginalization.

Through this approach, the study was able to capture both individual agency and structural constraint, providing a comprehensive understanding of female street vendors' lived experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown.

1.5.4 Research Methods

Research methods refer to the procedures a researcher adopts to solve a research problem (Negara, 2023). The research design must align with the methods (Negara, 2023).

1.5.2.1 Selection of Participants

Participants were contacted at their place of work, namely at the Plaza taxi rank. The contact was made to explain the nature of the study and request their participation. If they were willing to participate in the study, the researcher would contact them by exchanging phone numbers. To ensure participants who could provide in-depth information criteria were used for their selection. Participants needed to be female, operating as a street vendor during the pandemic, resided within the OR Tambo Municipality and sold items such as fruits, snacks, cigarettes, cosmetic products, or clothing at Mthatha Plaza near the taxi rank. The study did not include male street vendors or those who did not reside within the OR Tambo District Municipality.

1.5.2.2 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting individuals who form part of the research and help answer the research question at hand (Andrade, 2020). Typically, the sample is representative of the population (Andrade, 2020), as the entire population cannot be part of it, nor can it be included in the research itself. So, one attempts to find individuals who represent the general population. The study sampled a small number of participants because in-depth interviews were conducted with each of them to obtain rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

1.5.2.3 Data Collection

This study used semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face. A semi-structured interview entails a verbal interaction prompted by the interviewer from the respondent (Pin, 2023), in this case, the research participant. The interview's aim is to collect information and give an account of a person's experience and perception of the world

(Pin, 2023). Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research to elicit information from individuals or groups (Pin, 2023). In this case, female street vendors were interviewed to get a better understanding of their experiences during the strict lockdown levels.

1.5.2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, a pliant method that enables the researcher to emphasise data in various ways used to analysis the data. This includes the methodical recognition, interpretation, organisation and submission of patterns from a database by focusing on themes extracted from the database (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This approach allows the researcher to make sense of the collective or shared experiences from the data.

Thematic analysis has six steps, which tend to be more recursive than linear (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The initial step in thematic analysis is to peruse the entire data set. After the initial step, the interviewer works towards generating codes (Braun & Clarke (2006). The third step is to review the coded and collected data excerpts to identify potential themes of broad significance. The researcher then reviews the themes. Afterwards, themes are defined and named. The sixth and final step involves writing the final review of the findings. The stages of thematic analysis were implemented in this research, according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarkle's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The researcher first familiarised herself with the data by repeatedly listening to audio recordings and reading the interview transcripts several times. This process enabled immersions in the data and facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and meanings.

Following familiarization, initial codes were generated manually from the interview transcripts. Coding involved highlighting meaningful segments of text and assigning descriptive labels that reflected participants' experiences. Examples of initial codes included "loss of income", "fear of infection", "police harassment", "prayer", "family support", "government neglect" and "emotional distress".

The coded data were then reviewed and grouped into broader categories based on conceptual similarity. Related codes were clustered together to form preliminary themes. For example, codes relating to loss of income, inability to trade and reduced customer numbers were grouped under the preliminary theme "Experiences during

the COVID-19 Lockdown Restrictions”. Similarly, codes relating to prayer, reliance on faith and support from fellow vendors were grouped under the theme “Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Female Street Vendors”.

Themes were subsequently reviewed against the full data set to ensure that they accurately represented participants’ experiences and reflected meaningful patterns across interviews. During this stage, some codes were merged, refined or reallocated to ensure coherence and distinctiveness between themes.

The final themes were then defined, named and interpreted in relation to the research questions and theoretical frameworks guiding the study. The analysis resulted in six overarching themes that captured the shared experiences, coping strategies, support needs and long-term consequences reported by participants during and after the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

1.6 MEASURES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness strategies were implemented to strengthen the integrity of findings and minimise misinterpretation (Eryilmaz, 2022; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

1.6.1 Credibility

Credibility was strengthened by providing honest, detailed accounts of data collection and presenting findings that reflected participants’ realities (Liao, 2018; Stahl & King, 2020). Credibility was further supported through member checking and careful use of direct quotations to demonstrate alignment between themes and participant narratives.

1.6.2 Transferability

Transferability of findings to other contexts, was supported through thick description, which involved detailed reporting of the study context, participants, setting and data collection processes (Shaffer, 2018; Johnson, Adkins & Chauvin, 2020). Demographic and contextual details were included without compromising anonymity.

1.6.3 Dependability

Dependability was addressed by promoting consistency in data collection and analysis procedures over time. Member checking was used with selected participants to verify transcript accuracy and reduce misinterpretation (McKim, 2023). Participants

reviewed portions of the data and had the opportunity to correct errors or remove information they did not want to include.

Reflexivity was incorporated to acknowledge and bracket the researcher's assumptions, values and potential biases during the research process (Ramsook, 2018). The researcher reflected positionality and documented potential influences on interpretation.

1.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability was enhanced by ensuring that findings were grounded in the data and could be traced back to participant accounts (Nyathi, 2018). Raw data (audio recordings and transcripts) were securely stored and maintained to support auditability and transparency.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were upheld to protect participants and ensure the responsible conduct of research (Arifin, 2018). Participants were informed of the study procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality measures and their right to withdraw without consequences.

1.7.1 Informed Consent

The ethic of Informed consent ensures voluntary participation in the study. Each participant was given adequate information about the study to make an informed decision to participate. The interviews were conducted in the local language, IsiXhosa, which both participants and the researcher are comfortable with. The researcher provided all relevant information, including the nature of the study, any potential risks, how the data will be handled, and who will handle the data. Moreover, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and that the information they provide will be recorded, along with details on how the interview would be recorded. All this information was included in the consent form so that each participant could make an informed decision to participate in the study (Arifin, 2018). During the informed consent process, each participant was given a sheet outlining the purpose of the study, what would be required of them, the nature of participation, and the benefits of participating. Furthermore, participants were informed about how their

information would be securely stored and the potential risks of participating in the study.

1.7.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from transcripts and reports. Confidentiality refers to ensuring that personal information about the participant is not disclosed. It is also the researcher's responsibility to determine which information can be reported and which cannot, so that the participant's identity is always protected (Taquette & Souza, 2022). In this study, pseudonyms were used when reporting results to protect the identities of each participant. Interviews were conducted in ways that protected privacy as far as possible within a public setting. The researcher strategically positioned interviews to minimize exposure and protect participants' comfort.

1.7.3 Anonymity

Anonymity was ensured by removing specific identifying descriptors. Autonomy is another ethical principle we strive to uphold in the research. This principle refers to the research participants' right to free will, choice, agency, and self-governance (Kyngas, Mikkonen, Kaariainen, 2019). The basis of this principle is that participants are free to make their own choices and exert control over their lives without being influenced by the researcher or other external factors (Kyngas et al., 2019). To uphold this principle, the research participants were given a consent form with all the details of the study to decide whether they would participate. The use of pseudonyms is another strategy participants.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Committee of the relevant department, which would allow other independent parties to access the study to ensure it adheres to ethical guidelines (Grady, 2018).

1.7.4 Beneficence/ Non-maleficence

The principle of beneficence refers to the responsibility of the researcher to enhance, maximize, and optimize the benefits to research participants and society at large, whereas non-maleficence refers to minimising any potential harm to research participants and society at large (Kyngas et al., 2019). It was the researcher's responsibility to periodically check in with the participants to ensure that the study was

not causing any harm, whether in terms of psychological distress or eliciting negative emotions from their experiences of the pandemic.

Participants were monitored for emotional distress during and after interviews. Where distress emerged, appropriate referral options to psychosocial services were provided. The study aimed to minimise harm and maximise benefit by contributing knowledge that could inform psychosocial interventions.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

It is important to give clarity for concepts used consistently through the dissertation.

1.8.1 Informal Sector

The informal sector refers to paid economic activities that are not regulated by formal taxation, labour laws or state oversight, although the activities themselves may be legal (Abebe, 2017; Williams, 2017). It includes selling goods or providing services outside formal organisational structures. Informal work is characterised by limited regulation and exclusion from formal measures of national income (Etim & Daramola, 2020).

1.8.2 Street Vendor

A street vendor is an individual who sells goods or services in public spaces without a permanent structure, often using a temporary or mobile stall (Moagi, Ivanovic & Adinolfi, 2021; Chakraborty & Koley, 2018). This study applied this definition when referring to street vendors. Street vending is a crucial component of the economic structure that sustains individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Hilma, 2020). The most common type of vending is that of street food. This type requires minimal processing; it is usually ready-to-go and easily available (Hilma, 2020).

1.8.3 COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is a respiratory virus that affects the airways and lung function and was declared a global pandemic following its spread from an initial outbreak in 2019 (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). The pandemic resulted in large-scale infections and mortality globally. By 31 December 2021, the World Health Organisation

(WHO) reported over 287 million confirmed cases worldwide, including approximately 5.4 million deaths (Aleshin-Guendel, Sadinle & Wakefield, 2023). Common symptoms included coughing, fever, fatigue and difficulty breathing (Cares-Marambio et al., 2021).

1.8.4 Coping Mechanism

A coping mechanism is a cognitive or behavioural strategy used to manage stressful situations that threaten emotional and psychological well-being (Baqutayan, 2015). Coping strategies could include seeking support, engaging in religious practices, talking to trusted individuals, engaging in exercise and other adaptive methods. This study focused primarily on adaptive coping mechanisms used by female street vendors during lockdown restrictions. According to Rana et al. (2020), there are four stages that people go through when they encounter crises and then employ coping mechanism to overcome the threat. People go through these stages to find a coping mechanism (Rana et al., 2020). Firstly, people evaluate the situation and one's ability to cope; secondly, they use problem solving skills; thirdly, stress management assists them to cope; and lastly, when the situation seems persistent, people then employ sense and reason despite the circumstances.

1.8.5 Psychological Distress

Psychological distress refers to emotional suffering characterised by symptoms such as anxiety, stress, despair and trauma-related reactions that compromise daily functioning (Morris, Moghaddam, Tickle, & Biswas, 2018; Fordjour et al., 2020). Psychological distress relates to the form of unpleasant emotions, resulting in dissatisfaction with one's life. Lockdown restrictions, loss of income and inability to meet household needs were understood as conditions that could trigger psychological distress among street vendors (El-Monshed, Fayed & Loutfy, 2021).

1.9 CHAPTER DIVISION

The study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One is an introductory chapter that provided background on South Africa's socio-economic context, with a specific focus on the informal economy and street vending as a livelihood for women. It outlined the challenges faced by female street vendors prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and how the lockdown restrictions intensified

their economic and social vulnerabilities. The chapter also presented the research problem, aims, objectives and the study's significance.

Chapter Two offers a comprehensive review of the existing literature on street vending. It also introduces and explains the theoretical framework that underpins the study and guides the interpretation of participants' lived experiences.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology employed in the study. It discusses qualitative research design, sampling methods, data collection tools, and data analysis procedures. The chapter also explains how trustworthiness was ensured throughout the research process and addresses ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the study's findings. It focuses on the lived experiences of female street vendors during COVID-19 restrictions in the Eastern Cape Province. The chapter highlights key themes that emerged from the data. These findings are interpreted and discussed in relation to the reviewed literature and theoretical framework, showing how the participants' experiences align with or differ from existing studies.

Chapter Five concludes the study by summarising the main findings, drawing conclusions based on the research objectives, and offering recommendations for policy, future research, and practical interventions by Health Care Practitioners to support female street vendors.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic created widespread socio-economic disruptions globally, with severe implications for informal workers who depend on daily earnings for survival. In South Africa, the sudden implementation of national lockdown measures significantly affected individuals operating within the informal sector, particularly female street vendors. The Eastern Cape, characterised by high unemployment, poverty, and economic vulnerability, presents a context in which many women rely on street vending as their primary source of income. The abrupt restriction of movement and economic activity left many vendors with unsold stock, financial strain and heightened uncertainty about their livelihoods.

Financial hardship during the lockdown period not only threatened economic survival but also had psychological consequences, including stress, anxiety and feelings of

helplessness. Female street vendors, positioned at the intersection of gender inequality and informal economic marginalisation, faced compounded challenges with limited institutional support. The absence of stable income and insufficient social protection mechanisms intensified their vulnerability and affected their ability to support their families.

This chapter laid the foundation for this research which sought to explore and develop an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The research methodology and design were outlined explaining that a qualitative research approach grounded within a constructivist research paradigm guided this study. Research methods such as sampling, data collection and data analysis were also briefly outlined.

Chapter 2 discusses the contextual, theoretical, and conceptual frameworks underpinning the study, including Feminist Theory and Informal Sector Theory, which frame the gendered and structural realities of female street vending within the broader socio-economic context.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the study's context and outlined the challenges faced by female street vendors, specifically those operating in the Eastern Cape Province during the COVID-19 lockdown. This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual foundations underpinning the study on the experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown in the Eastern Cape. It provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, followed by a review of relevant literature on the informal economy, gendered labour, the impact of COVID-19 on informal workers, and coping strategies in times of crisis. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in literature and situating the present study within existing scholarship.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As indicated in Chapter 1, a study requires a theoretical framework that explains why the research problem exists (Pardede, 2018) and provide a lens through which to view the findings.

2.2.1 Feminist Theory / Gender Theory

South Africa is a country with a deeply oppressive history, namely apartheid (Mnisi & Nethengwe, 2024). The conclusion of the apartheid era potentially meant political, social, and economic emancipation and gender equality (Mnisi & Nethengwe, 2024). However, this was not how things progressed. Women continued to be marginalised, discriminated against and the target of abuse and violence (Strydom & Mbukanma, 2022).

This study adopts a feminist theoretical lens to understand how structural gender inequalities shape the lived experiences of female street vendors. Feminist theory argues that women's economic participation is often shaped by patriarchal systems that confine women to low-paying, informal, and precarious forms of work (Strydom & Mbukanma, 2022). The gendered division of labour further places disproportionate caregiving responsibilities on women, limiting their economic mobility and increasing vulnerability during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Strydom & Mbukanma,

2022). For many decades, women have been marginalised as a group in all spheres of production - economically, politically and socially (Sithole & Moyo, 2024). This is especially evident in Africa, particularly in South Africa.

Women constitute a significant proportion of informal workers globally, accounting approximately 60% of informal labour (Strydom & Mbukanma, 2022). Despite this high level of participation, women in informal employment reportedly earn approximately 16% less than their male counterparts within comparable sectors (Strydom & Mbuanma, 2022). This disparity contributes significantly to women's economic vulnerability, particularly among female-headed households and women employed in precarious forms of informal work.

Gendered divisions of labour within the informal economy partly explain these income disparities. Women are more likely to engage in lower-paying forms of informal work such as street vending, domestic work and sewing, while men are more commonly concentrated in relatively higher-paying occupations such as construction, transport and mechanical work (Ramparsad, 2020; Adeleken & Bussin, 2022). Occupational gender segregation continues to influence women's earning potential and economic mobility within South Africa's labour market (Adeleken & Bussin, 2022). In addition, women frequently carry disproportionate caregiving and household responsibilities, which may reduce the number of hours available for income-generating activities compared to their male counterparts (Ramparsad, 2020).

In South Africa, where unemployment rates remain critically high, women are disproportionately affected by economic exclusion. Female unemployment rose to 34% during the first quarter of 2021 (StatsSA, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified already strained household finances, particularly among female-headed households and those dependent on informal economic activities such as street vending. Lockdown restrictions disrupted informal trading activities and, for many women, resulted in an immediate loss of livelihood and income.

2.2.1.1 Marxist Feminism and Structural Economic Marginalisation

Marxist feminism provides a structural and materialist lens in capitalist economies. Rooted in the classical works of Karl Marx and further developed by feminist scholars, Marxist feminism argues that women's oppression is deeply embedded in capitalist systems of production and social reproduction (Federici, 2012; Vogel, 2013). Unlike

liberal feminist perspectives that focus primarily on legal equality and access to opportunity, Marxist feminism emphasises economic relations, class stratification and the gendered division of labour as foundational to women's marginalisation.

Central to Marxist feminist theory is the concept of *social reproduction*. Social reproduction refers to the unpaid labour that sustains households and reproduces the workforce, including childcare, domestic labour, caregiving and emotional labour, activities disproportionately performed by women (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012). Marxist feminists argue that capitalism depends on this unpaid labour, yet it remains undervalued and unrecognised within formal economic structures. Women's economic participation is therefore often secondary, precarious and undervalued because their primary role is socially constructed as reproductive rather than productive (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012).

In the South African context, this framework is particularly relevant. Post-apartheid socio-economic inequalities, high unemployment rates and persistent gender disparities have compelled many women to seek survivalist forms of income generation in the informal sector (Chen, 2012). Feministic Marxism theory argues that women who eventually enter into the informal trade, such as street vending, do so as a coping mechanism and use vending as an alternative skill for their disenfranchisement (Sithole & Moyo, 2024). Informal trading is frequently not a matter of choice, but a structural necessity shaped by limited access to formal employment, educational disparities and intersecting inequalities related to race, gender and class (Chant, 2014). Within this context, female street vendors are positioned at the intersection of economic marginalisation and gendered responsibility (Chen, 2012).

From a Marxist feminist perspective, women participation in street vending is not viewed simply as entrepreneurial activity. Instead, it is understood as labour shaped by structurally unequal capitalist systems. Marxist feminism interprets women's participation in street vending not merely as entrepreneurial activity, but as labour situated within a structurally unequal capitalist system (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012). From this perspective, informal economic participation reflects the gendered organisation of labour markets in which women are disproportionately concentrated in precarious, low-income, and unprotected forms of work (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012; Vogel, 2013;). Informal traders typically operate outside formal labour protections such as unemployment insurance, pension schemes, medical benefits,

and occupational health safeguards (Chen, 2012; ILO, 2018). This exclusion is not accidental; rather, it reflects broader patterns of labour restrictions under neoliberal economic arrangements, where economic risk is increasingly shifted onto workers, particularly those positioned at the margins of formal employment (Fraser, 2016).

As Chen (2012) argues, the informal economy frequently functions as a 'buffer zone' within capitalist systems, absorbing surplus labour during periods of economic contraction while transferring minimal responsibility for social protection to the state or private sector. Marxist feminist scholars extend this argument by emphasising that women's overrepresentation in informal labour is tied to structural gender inequalities, including unequal access to education, property ownership, capital, and formal employment opportunities (Agarwal, 1997; Chant, 2014). Consequently, women assume high levels of economic risk with limited institutional support, reinforcing both class-based and gendered vulnerabilities (Chen, 2012).

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and amplified these structural inequalities. Lockdown restrictions halted informal trading in public spaces without simultaneously guaranteeing wage subsidies, emergency income replacement or comprehensive relief mechanisms for informal workers (ILO, 2020; Rogan & Skinner, 2020). From a Marxist feminist perspective, this reflects the asymmetrical distribution of vulnerability within capitalist systems, where workers in formal sectors were, in some instances, able to access remote work arrangements, furlough schemes, or state-backed wage protections, while informal workers experienced immediate income cessation (Fraser, 2016; ILO, 2020). Female street vendors, whose earnings are often daily and survival-based, faced acute financial instability with limited savings or buffers against economic shock (Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

Their structural positioning within the informal economy rendered them economically expendable within crisis governance frameworks (Rogan & Skinner, 2020), as policy responses frequently prioritised formal-sector stability over informal livelihood protection. Marxist feminism, therefore, situates the intensified hardship experienced by female street vendors during lockdown not as an unintended side effect of public health measures but as a predictable outcome of systemic inequalities embedded within capitalist labour systems (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012). Women's economic precarity in this context reflects the interlocking dynamics of class exploitation, gendered labour division and institutional neglect.

By applying Marxist feminist theory, the lived experiences of female street vendors are understood not as isolated hardships, but as reflections of broader structural exploitation and gendered economic inequality. Their resilience and adaptation during crisis conditions must therefore be interpreted within systems that simultaneously depend on and marginalise their labour.

2.2.2 Informal Economy Theory

Informal Economy Theory provides a structural understanding of street vending as part of a broader survivalist economic system. The informal sector includes any form of paid enterprise that is not regulated by taxes, authorities, or labour laws (Williams, 2017). The activity is either to sell or provide a service to the public. The activity is legal; however, it is not regulated through ties to any societal structures (Abebe, 2017). The informal sector is mostly associated with low-income countries and marginalised people who have little to no form of education (Chakraborty & Koley, 2018). The informal sector ranges from a street vendor to a shoe-shiner, the lady who knits jerseys and the barber on the corner. The distinguishing feature of the informal sector is its mode of operation and management, which tend not to be regulated by the state and are not included in state's national income (Etim & Daramola, 2020).

In South Africa, informal trade plays a significant role in employment and food security (Mukamba et al., 2024). However, informal workers are excluded from formal labour protection, making them particularly vulnerable during lockdown restrictions. South Africa has a large informal sector and according to World Economics (2024), it is projected to contribute over 250 billion rands to gross domestic product (GDP). Furthermore, this sector accounts for over 18% of employment and contributes approximately 6% of the country's GDP. Like the formal sector, the informal sector is not without disparities, such as disproportionate gender, cultural and religious participation (Mukamba et al., 2024). The informal sector has its own unique challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, including umbrellas and shelters for adverse weather, storage for goods and coolers to keep their items fresh and cold (Mukamba, 2024).

The informal sector tends to include more females than males, as it is said to incorporate family responsibilities (Mukamba et al., 2024), such as childcare, due to its flexible working hours. It is said that this sector provides many households with a

source of income, especially in developing countries and impoverished communities like those in South Africa (Valodia & Francis, 2020). Furthermore, these sectors can also help those who may have lost formal employment due to retrenchments and the downsizing of companies and institutions. (Burger & Fourie, 2019). The informal sector continues to ensure that people unable to be absorbed into the formal sector, make ends meet. However, this sector is not without its own share of problems from policymakers and local authorities. Many informal workers report harassment by local police, including the confiscation of their goods, removal from the streets, and demands for levies they cannot afford (Mukamba et al., 2024).

2.2.2.1 Street-Vending

Street vending is part of the informal sector and has a large-scale presence globally (Makumba et al., 2024). In South Africa, street vendors are the most prevalent group. A street vendor is an individual who occupies a space in a public setting without a permanent structure and sells goods or services to the public. According to Chakraborty and Koley (2018), a street vendor can be defined as a person who offers goods for sale at the same time, not having a permanent built structure from which he/she sells their items from but may have a temporary static structure or mobile stall (Moagi et al., 2021). Street vendors are categorised according to their business type:

Larry Vendors are typically mobile and sell fruits and vegetables.

Mobile Vendors move from one place to another in a day as they are mobile. They are generally younger females or males and sell a mix of semi-perishable and non-perishable items.

Semi-Static Units are structure like a tent that vendors can take down at the end of the day.

Static Units are a fixed stall that vendors use to run their business (Batt & Jariwala, 2018).

Street vendors entice different groups, from locals, foreign nationals, and young and old individuals. Also important to note is that they attract both genders- men and women (Makumba et al., 2024); however, women tend to be overproportionate to men where they sell: sweets, chips, and vegetables. Studies have also shown that female street vendors tend to be over 40 years old and have low levels of education (Makumba et al., 2024). This may speak to the notion that, after 40 years, they are no

longer young and therefore realise that government employment policies will not accommodate them (Makumba et al., 2024). When one wishes to enter street trade, they often require little capital to start the business: for example, females can easily use household utensils to cook and sell food (Makumba et al., 2024).

Women report that street-vending produces benefits like the ability to generate their own income, the flexibility of working hours, which may help juggle household duties like chores and child-rearing responsibilities (Makumba et al., 2024). It is vital not to romanticise street-vending, as entry into the street trade is due to societal hardships and poverty (Makumba et al., 2024). It often becomes necessary to enter the street vending trade, as researchers have shown that, as poverty and unemployment increase, the likelihood of entering the trade increases (Bhattarai & Pathak, 2020).

A study by Ohsorge and Yu (2022) revealed that the informal sector tends to expand during periods of recession, retrenchments, and pandemics such as COVID-19. During such times, people are attracted to the street trade. The COVID-19 pandemic caused havoc worldwide and disrupted economic production. The strict level 5 lockdown restriction imposed by the South African president meant that businesses had to shut down, in turn affecting the economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic formally known as SARS-CoV-2, is a highly infectious virus that primarily affects the respiratory system, including the airways, lungs and blood vessels (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). The outbreak was first identified in China during 2019 and rapidly spread across the world, resulting in a global health crisis (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). By 2020, millions of people had been infected worldwide, and many succumbed to the virus. Common symptoms associated with COVID-19 included coughing, sneezing, fever, fatigue, headaches, breathing difficulties and muscle pain (Marambio et al., 2021).

Due to the highly contagious nature of the virus, many countries implemented strict public health measures and economic shutdowns to reduce transmission. In South Africa, the government introduced stringent lockdown relations that restricted public movement and permitted only essential services to continue operating under regulated conditions (Ntombana, Sibanda & Lerotholi, 2024). These restrictions had severe implications for informal workers, particularly street vendors whose livelihoods depended on daily face-to-face trading within public spaces. Since informal street

trading was largely excluded from essential economic activity during the initial lockdown levels, many street vendors experienced an immediate loss of income and heightened economic insecurity.

The interruption of trading activities left many vendors vulnerable to poverty, food insecurity and hardship. As a result, street vendors were forced to devise alternative means of survival during the lockdown period (Ntombana et al., 2024). In some instances, these coping strategies potentially increased their risk of exposure to the virus as they attempted to secure income and sustain their households.

2.2.3 Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, developed by Lazarus and Folkman, explains how individuals appraise and respond to stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The model consists of primary appraisal (evaluation of threat), secondary appraisal (evaluation of coping resources) and coping responses, which may be problem-focused or emotion-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The model is centred around the notion that stressful events will trigger the primary appraisal process, which individuals will individually assess the extent of the threat of the stressful event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When an event is registered as stressful, there is what is called Secondary Appraisal, which involves a global assessment of an individual's coping abilities for managing this stressful life event (Goh et al., 2010). Thereafter, an individual will employ a coping mechanism in response to the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This framework is relevant to the loss of income, health fears, caregiving stress, and the strategies they employed to survive during this period.

2.3.3.1 Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

While Marxist feminism provides a macro-structural explanation of vulnerability, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping offers a psychological lens through which to understand how individuals interpret and respond to stressors. The model conceptualises stress as a dynamic transaction between the individual and the environment. Stress does not arise solely from the external event, but from how the individual appraises the event and evaluates available coping resources (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to the model, individuals engage in *primary appraisal*, assessing whether an event is irrelevant, benign or threatening (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman,

1984). When an event is appraised as threatening or harmful, individuals proceed to *secondary appraisal*, evaluating whether they possess adequate internal and external resources to cope with the situation (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress arises when demands are perceived as exceeding available coping resources.

Coping strategies are broadly divided into two primary categories:

1. *Problem-focused coping*, which seeks to alter the source of stress.
2. *Emotion-focused coping*, which seeks to regulate emotional responses to stress (Baqtayan, 2015; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown restrictions constituted a significant environmental stressor for female street vendors. The prohibition of trading, restricted movement and fear of infection likely triggered primary appraisals of threat, specifically threat to livelihood, food security and family stability. Secondary appraisal processes may have involved assessing savings, access to government relief, community support, faith-based coping mechanisms, or borrowing opportunities.

Importantly, Lazarus (1999) emphasised that coping resources are shaped by socio-economic context. Individuals operating in conditions of poverty or structural marginalisation may possess fewer coping resources during secondary appraisal. This understanding is especially critical when examining the experiences of female street vendors. Limited financial buffers, absence of unemployment insurance, and restricted social protection limit available coping alternatives (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, coping is constrained by structural location.

The model allows for an understanding of resilience without romanticising hardship. Resilience does not mean a lack of distress; instead, it involves adjusting to environmental constraints. In contexts of crises, coping strategies may prioritize survival over psychological comfort.

2.3 INFORMAL STREET VENDING IN SOUTH AFRICA

This section explores the trade in South Africa. Street vending has historically served as a livelihood strategy for marginalised populations excluded from formal employment (Batt & Jariwala, 2018). The sector contributes significantly to household income and local food (Moagi et al., 2021). As previously discussed in Section 2.2.2.1, street vending forms part of the informal economy and involves the sale of goods or services

within public spaces without permanent formal structures (Charkraborty & Koley, 2018).

2.3.2 Challenges Experienced by Female Street Vendors

Female street vendors face multiple, intersecting challenges that are rooted in economic precarity, gender-based inequality, limited access to financial services, and regulatory pressures. Informal trading is characterised by income instability, absence of formal contracts, limited labour protection and vulnerability to eviction or confiscation of goods (Chen, 2012; ILO, 2018). Women are disproportionately represented in the more insecure segments of the informal economy, where earnings are lower and exposure to risk is higher (Bonnet, Vanek & Chen, 2019).

Gender-based inequality further compounds these vulnerabilities. Feminist scholars argue that women's economic participation occurs within patriarchal systems that structure access to capital, land, credit and public space (Agarwal, 1997; Chant, 2014). Female street vendors often experience a 'double burden', combining income generation with unpaid caregiving and household responsibilities (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012). This dual role limits their mobility, trading hours and ability to diversify livelihood strategies.

Limited access to formal financial services is another persistent challenge. Informal traders frequently lack collateral, credit history or documentation required for bank loans and insurance (ILO, 2018). As a result, many rely on informal savings groups or high-interest borrowing, which may increase financial vulnerability over time (Bonnet et al., 2019). Regulatory pressures, including licencing requirements, trading permits and enforcement practices, also contribute to insecurity. Street vendors may face harassment, confiscation of goods or eviction from trading spaces, particularly in urban contexts where informal trade is poorly integrated into municipal planning frameworks (Skinner & Watson, 2018).

During the COVID-19 lockdown, these challenges significantly intensified. Movement restrictions disrupted access to trading spaces and reduced consumer activity, losses (Rogan & Skinner, 2020). For women who depend on daily earnings to support households, such disruptions had severe implications for food security and debt accumulation. Thus, the pandemic amplified pre-existing structural vulnerabilities embedded within both gender inequality and informal economic positioning.

2.5 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON INFORMAL WORKERS

COVID-19 lockdown measures disproportionately affected informal workers due to their reliance on daily income and lack of employment protection (ILO, 2020). Unlike many formal-sector workers who could transition to remote work or access wage subsidies, informal workers experienced abrupt income cessation during stringent lockdown levels, particularly under Level 5 restrictions in South Africa (Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

Empirical studies indicate that informal workers experienced heightened food insecurity during the early phases of lockdown (Casale & Shepherd, 2021). Household surveys conducted during the pandemic revealed that loss of informal income was closely associated with increased hunger, debt dependency and material hardship, particularly among women-headed households (Rogan & Skinner, 2020). The absence of savings and limited access to government relief exacerbated vulnerability.

Previous research conducted among economically vulnerable populations has demonstrated strong associations between poverty, economic insecurity and psychological distress (Lund et al., 2011). These vulnerabilities became particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Financial insecurity, uncertainty about the future, and fear of infection contributed to elevated stress and anxiety levels. Informal traders' inability to operate during lockdown intensified feelings of helplessness and loss of control, which are key stress indicators within coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Women informal workers were particularly affected due to simultaneous caregiving responsibilities, including childcare during school closures (Casale & Shepherd, 2021). The intersection of economic shutdown and expanded domestic labour demands deepened gendered inequality. Thus, the pandemic did not create vulnerability among informal workers; rather, it exposed and amplified structural precarity embedded within informal labour systems.

2.6 COPING MECHANISMS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Coping mechanisms among informal workers often include financial adaptation strategies such as borrowing, diversifying goods, adjusting trading practices, reducing household expenditure, and participating in informal savings groups or stokvels

(Bonnet et al., 2019; Skinner & Watson, 2018). These strategies reflect attempts to manage economic shocks within constrained resource environments.

Coping strategies refer to behavioural and cognitive efforts used to overcome, control, endure and minimise stressful events (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) categorise coping into problem-focused coping, aimed at addressing the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, aimed at regulating emotional responses to stress. Among informal workers, problem-focused coping may involve seeking alternative income sources, negotiating with suppliers or leveraging social networks for financial support. Emotion-focused coping may include reliance on religious faith, social connectedness, acceptance, or emotional suppression (Baqtayan, 2015).

Social capital plays an important role in coping within informal economic contexts. Informal savings groups, kinship networks and community solidarity mechanisms often function as informal safety nets where formal protection systems are absent (Bonnet et al., 2019). However, while these coping strategies demonstrate resilience, they are frequently short-term survival responses rather than sustainable long-term solutions. Prolonged crisis conditions, such as extended lockdown restrictions, may erode coping capacity as debt accumulates and social networks become similarly strained (ILO, 2020).

Thus, coping among female street vendors during crisis periods should be understood as adaptive responses within structurally constrained environments. Resilience does not negate vulnerability; rather, it reflects resourcefulness amidst systemic inequality.

2.7 PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION

There is limited research on structured psychosocial support specifically designed for informal workers in South Africa. While mental health interventions have increasingly been integrated into primary healthcare systems, informal workers, particularly women operating in precarious economic conditions, remain underrepresented in formal psychosocial support frameworks (Lund et al., 2011; Sorsdahl, Kakuma, Lund & Stein, 2015). Much of the existing literature focuses on formal-sector employees or on general community mental health services, with limited attention to the unique stressors faced by informal traders.

Informal workers experience multiple, intersecting stressors, including income instability, exposure to unsafe working environments, gender-based violence risks, and limited access to social protection (Chen, 2012; ILO, 2018). During crisis contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, these stressors are intensified by sudden economic shocks, mobility restrictions, and uncertainty about regulatory enforcement (ILO, 2020). Research suggests that economic precarity and food insecurity are strongly associated with psychological distress, anxiety and depressive symptoms (Lund et al., 2010). However, informal workers often lack access to structured psychological services due to financial, geographical and stigma-related barriers.

Community-based and task-shifting interventions have shown promise in low- and middle-income contexts. Task-shifting refers to the redistribution of mental health support functions to trained lay counsellors or community workers to increase accessibility and reduce cost barriers (Patel, Chowdhary, Rahman & Verdeli, 2011). In South Africa, community health worker models and group-based psychosocial interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in improving psychological well-being among vulnerable populations (Lund et al., 2011). These approaches may provide adaptable models for supporting female street vendors, particularly when integrated into community structures rather than hospital-based systems.

Gender-sensitive support programmes are also critical. Feminist-informed interventions emphasise the need to recognise women's structural constraints, caregiving burdens and exposure to gendered risks when designing mental health initiatives (Wathen & MacMillan, 2013). Psychosocial support in this context must move beyond individual counselling and incorporate social assistance, livelihood stabilisation and community solidarity mechanisms. Studies on disaster and crisis response indicate that effective psychosocial interventions integrate emotional support with practical resource linkage, social connectedness and economic stabilisation efforts (WHO, 2013).

For female street vendors, psychosocial support should therefore be contextually embedded, accessible within trading environments or community settings and responsive to lived realities. Interventions that combine economic strengthening, peer-support groups, referral networks and trauma-informed counselling may be particularly relevant in crisis contexts. Integrating psychosocial support into broader community

development and informal-sector support programmes may enhance both psychological resilience and livelihood sustainability.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented theories that created the theoretical framework that supported this research and provided a lens through which to view the findings. The review of literature relevant to the topic assisted in developing an understanding of informal trading and street vendors. The review highlighted structural gender inequalities, vulnerabilities within the informal economy, and coping responses to crisis situations. The next chapter presents the research methodology used to explore these experiences empirically.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter contextualised this study within the broader socio-economic and gendered realities of the informal economy in South Africa and explored the theoretical frameworks guiding the inquiry. Having established the conceptual foundations of the research. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and design employed in this study to answer the research question: *What were the experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?* It provides a detailed description of the research paradigm, the research approach and the research design. The chapter further explains the methods used for sampling, data collection and data analysis. The final section discusses how trustworthiness and rigour were ensured and the ethical considerations that guided the research process.

3.2 RATIONALE FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Female street vendors constitute an important component of the informal economy and often operate under conditions of economic insecurity, limited social protection and gendered caregiving responsibilities (Chen, 2012; Rogan & Skinner, 2020). The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions disrupted informal trading activities and placed additional pressure on women who relied on daily earnings to support themselves and their households (Casale & Shepherd, 2021). While existing literature has documented the economic consequences of the pandemic for informal workers, fewer qualitative studies have explored how female street vendors in smaller South African contexts such as Mthatha experienced and interpreted these disruptions.

This study was therefore undertaken to generate an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Particular attention was given to how participants experienced livelihood disruption, emotional distress, coping processes and psychosocial support needs. The study further sought to explore how women navigated these challenges within contexts characterised by poverty, unemployment and limited institutional support.

Accordingly, the study focused on female street vendors operating within the Mthatha Plaza area of the OR Tambo District Municipality. By foregrounding participants' own accounts, the study aimed to contribute contextually grounded knowledge regarding the experiences and coping strategies of women working within the informal economy during periods of crisis.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the systematic process of how a research study is conducted. This section presents the research paradigm that underpinned the research, the research approach and the research design.

3.3.1 Research Paradigm

This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism assumes that reality is socially produced, historically situated, and interpreted differently by individuals based on their lived contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Creswell, 2014). Constructivism is a paradigm that affirms that a population forms their personal understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing and reflecting on those experiences (O'Connor et al., 2018). Therefore, to the constructivist, forming meaning is learning. Constructivists propose that fully engaging in the learning process will lead to personal discovery of the truth (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Therefore, in the current study, potential participants have directly experienced the strict COVID-19 restrictions, and the researcher seeks to understand the insights they have gained from this experience. Essentially, the participants are required to reflect and explain their experiences of this phenomenon.

There are two processes through which knowledge is produced accommodation and assimilation. The accommodation method consists of framing one's mental representation of the exterior world, including the new experiences an individual receives in the mental senses, where old experiences were already situated (De Freitas, 2016). The assimilation process, on the other hand, consists of an individual incorporating the new experience into an already existing framework without altering that framework. Thus, in this case, both old and new experiences coexist in an individual's mental structure (De Freitas, 2016). For example, instead of introducing the idea that the hard lockdown was difficult and depressing, participants will be allowed to express how they experienced the lockdown restrictions. This is the

rationale behind the study's exploration of the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown.

3.3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative empirical approach was chosen because the subjective experiences of fear, resilience, uncertainty, faith, frustration, and survival cannot be meaningfully quantified. While statistical data may illustrate income decline, it cannot capture how it felt to return home without food to children or to negotiate dignity within economic precarity. This study prioritised depth over breadth, voice over abstraction, and meaning over measurement.

A qualitative approach guided the study. Qualitative research emphasises social meaning, context and complexity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It assumes that social phenomena cannot be separated from the environment in which they occur. Given that informal street vending is embedded within community networks, social obligations, family responsibilities, and structural inequality, a qualitative approach allowed for contextual depth. The approach was interpretive rather than positivist. It sought understanding rather than prediction.

Methodological Rationale

This study was conducted in the Eastern Cape Province because informal trading constitutes an important source of livelihood within the region, particularly in contexts characterised by unemployment and poverty. Female street vendors operating within Mthatha Plaza were selected because they experienced the direct economic and psychological effects of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The study sought to explore how these women experienced the pandemic and the coping strategies they employed during and after the lockdown period. Data collection was conducted in 2025 through semi-structured interviews reflecting retrospectively on participants' experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is typically idiographic and focuses on detailed exploration of individual cases. However, the present study sought to identify broader shared experiences and coping patterns across multiple participants rather than develop detailed case-by-case phenomenological interpretations. Thematic analysis was therefore considered more appropriate for addressing the study aims.

3.3.3 Research Design

For research to be conducted successfully, an appropriate research design is essential. A research design refers to the plan developed by the researcher prior to data collection to achieve the study's objectives in a valid and systematic manner (Asenahabi, 2019). Its primary purpose is to translate the research problem into data that can be analysed effectively, thereby providing relevant answers to the research questions while minimising costs (Asenahabi, 2019).

A qualitative research design could be narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography, case studies or and grounded theory (Haven & Grootel, 2019). A phenomenological design was applied for this study. The design was applicable for the study, since the aim of the study was to explore the core of human experiences about a particular topic or phenomenon through the lens of the research participant (Frenchette, Bitzaz & Tremblay, 2020).

This design focuses on the meaning of a phenomenon for individuals experiencing it (Haven & Grootel, 2019). An illustrative example of this would involve posing a question to a group of individuals such as: "What does it mean to be a single mother of a teenager?" The term phenomenology is also self-explanatory, in that it requires a certain phenomenon or topic, and from that phenomenon, one draws meaning from different individuals who experience it (Sarfo et al., 2021).

Thus, phenomenology offers an appealing understanding of the significance of daily activities in both life and the professional setting (Adams & van Manen, 2017). Phenomenology awakens us to become curious, to contemplate and to move towards the feelings of joy, love, loss, contact and care, together with every means of deeply human interpretation (Adams & van Manen, 2017). Capturing the essence provides a description of the phenomenon under study. Consequently, the final product of a successful phenomenological study is when the reader can confidently understand what it feels like to have experienced a phenomenon (Adams & van Manen, 2017).

This study adopted an Interpretive phenomenological orientation because the aim was not to describe participants' experiences, but also to interpret the meanings participants attached to those experiences within broader social and structural contexts. The analysis moved beyond surface-level description by engaging with how participants understood livelihood disruption, emotional distress, caregiving burdens

and coping during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Interpretation was further informed by the study's theoretical frameworks, namely Feminist Theory, the Informal Sector Framework and Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. These frameworks assisted the researcher in analysing how gender inequality, structural economic vulnerability and psychosocial stress shaped participants' lived realities. The study therefore adopted an interpretive rather than a poorly descriptive phenomenological approach.

Phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experience (van Manen, 2017). The focus is not merely on describing events but on interpreting the meaning of those events as lived by individuals.

In this study, phenomenology allowed the researcher to ask the following questions rather than analysing behaviour from an external advantage;

- What does it mean to be a woman dependent on daily trade income during a national shutdown?
- How is dignity experienced when income disappears overnight?
- How does one emotionally process uncertainty in a context already shaped by inequality?

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods are the specific tools and procedures used to systematically collect, analyze and interpret data to answer research questions.

3.4.1 Study Site

The study was conducted in Mthatha, within the OR Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. The region is marked by high unemployment rates and dependence on informal economic activity (StatsSA, 2022). The informal sector functions as an economic buffer against structural unemployment within Mthatha. Mthatha Plaza has a high density of informal traders. Although no official register or verified count of street vendors operating within Mthatha Plaza was available to the researcher, the area is widely recognized as a busy informal trading environment with a visible concentration of traders operating on a daily basis. The site was selected because of its active informal economy and the presence of female street vendors whose livelihoods were directly affected by the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The

absence of an official trader count did not affect the study, as the purpose of the research was not to determine the prevalence of street vending but rather to explore the lived experiences of women who had directly experienced the phenomenon under investigation.

The Eastern Cape province was selected because of its high unemployment rates, widespread informal economic activity and the visible concentration of female street vendors operating within Mthatha Plaza. Mthatha Plaza was selected because it serves as a major transport and commercial hub with a high concentration of female street vendors. The site therefore provided a suitable context for exploring livelihood vulnerability, coping strategies and psychosocial experiences associated with COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

3.4.2 Study Population

The population consisted of female street vendors operating within Mthatha Plaza within the OR Tambo District Municipality. Female street vendors are primarily responsible for supporting extended family members. Their socio-economic position increased their vulnerability during the lockdown period, making their experiences critical to understanding informal-sector resilience.

3.4.3 Sampling

There are two types of sampling methods: probability sampling, which is objective, and non-probability sampling, which is less objective (Stratton, 2021). The most common form of non-probability sampling is purposive sampling, but snowball sampling and convenience sampling may also be used (Stratton, 2021).

Non-probability sampling was used, as participants were selected purposefully based on their relevance to the research aims (Stratton, 2021). Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich participants directly affected by the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Sampling was guided by depth rather than representativeness. Participants were Included based on:

- Direct experience of trading during COVID-19 restrictions
- Gender (female)
- Location within Mthatha Plaza
- Willingness to share experiences

Exclusion Criteria:

- Male Street Vendors
- Traders not operating during COVID-19 restrictions.
- Individuals trading outside of Mthatha.

The Inclusion Criteria required participants to be female street vendors who were actively trading during the COVID-19 lockdown period, operated within the Mthatha Plaza area of the OR Tambo District Municipality, and were willing to share their experiences. Male street vendors were excluded because the study specifically sought to explore the gendered experiences of women operating within the informal economy. Vendors who were not actively trading during the COVID-19 lockdown period were excluded because they had not directly experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Street vendors operating outside the OR Tambo District Municipality were excluded because the study was geographically bounded to the Mthatha Plaza area sought to generate context-specific insights. These criteria were applied to ensure consistency with the study focus and to obtain detailed accounts from participants with direct experience of the phenomenon being investigated.

Participants were recruited directly from the Mthatha Plaza area. The researcher approached potential participants at their trading stalls, explained the purpose of the study and invited them to participate. Individuals who expressed interest were provided with further information about the study and informed consent procedures before interviews were arranged.

Some traders declined participation due to time constraints, lack of interest, or concerns regarding research participation. Their decision was respected and no further attempts were made to recruit them.

Sampling was informed by accessibility and participant suitability and therefore purposive sampling followed by convenience sampling was used. The study included eleven participants who ranged in age from 38 to 77 years and were primarily household breadwinners. The sample size was considered appropriate for phenomenological qualitative research, which prioritises depth and richness of lived experience over statistical generalisation. Saturation was reached when additional interviews yielded no substantially new themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation was determined through iterative analysis during data collection.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

An interview in research is a qualitative data collection method involving a directed conversation where a researcher (interviewer) asks open-ended questions to a participant (interviewee) to gather in-depth information, opinions, or experiences. It serves as a tool to understand the world from the interviewee's perspective

Semi-structured interviews allowed the use of predetermined guiding questions while providing flexibility to explore spontaneous issues raised by participants and to probe responses for depth and clarity (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Evans, 2018). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to facilitate relational engagement and contextual immersion (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). An in-depth interview guide (Appendix F) was employed to conduct interviews with women. The interviews were conducted in isiXhosa to support participant comfort and expression, and data were later translated and transcribed for reporting purposes. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes and were conducted in isiXhosa or English. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. No pilot study was conducted. Instead, the researcher relied on careful alignment between the interview guide and the research questions.

Data collection was conducted between August 14th 2025 until September 9th 2025, approximately four to five years after the most restrictive COVID-19 lockdown measures implemented between 2020 and 2021. Participants were therefore asked to reflect retrospectively on their experiences during the 2020-2021 lockdown restrictions. While retrospective accounts may be influenced by memory recall limitations, participants were able to provide detailed reflections on significant livelihood disruptions, emotional experiences and coping responses associated with the pandemic period.

3.5.1 DESCRIPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with female street vendors trading within Mthatha Plaza. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participants were selected because they had direct experience of trading before, during, and after COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

The participants ranged in age from 34 to 77 years, reflecting a diverse age profile and demonstrating the significant role of older women in informal economic activity. Many participants had extensive experience in street vending, with some having traded for

more than two decades. Participants sold a variety of goods, including fruit, vegetables, snacks, cigarettes, SIM cards, popcorn, sweets, and household food items.

Most participants were primary income earners within their households and reported significant caregiving responsibilities, including supporting children and grandchildren. Household sizes ranged from three to eleven members. These socio-economic circumstances were important to the study, as they shaped participants' experiences of economic vulnerability during the COVID-19 restrictions.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and identifying information was excluded from the study. Although participants were known to the researcher during data collection, their identities were protected in all transcripts, field notes and research reporting.

Table 3.5.2 presents the biographical profile of the Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Years Active in Street Vending	Goods Sold	Household Size	Children	Grandchildren
Nozibele	54	2010-2025	nail polish, earrings	4	3	0
Zola	61	2011-2025	Sweets, fruits, lollipops	5	2	3
Bulelewa	58	1996-2025	Corn	11	6	5
Sindiswe	34	2015-2025	Bananas, snacks	8	4	3
NoBright	58	2009-2025	bananas, sweets, cigarettes	4	0	4
Vuyiseka	38	2015-2025	Vegetables, sweet potatoes, spinach	6	4	0
Beauty	45	NA	SIM cards, potatoes, oranges	4	4	0

Pseudonym	Age	Years Active in Street Vending	Goods Sold	Household Size	Children	Grandchildren
Siziwe	52	NA	Snacks, sweets, lollipops	3	0	0
Grace	47	2018-2025	Chips, popcorn	4	3	0
Qhawekazi	47	2017-2025	Sweets, chips	4	3	0
Londiwe	77	1994-2025	Cigarettes, popcorn, bananas, chips	3	1	0

“NA indicates participants who could not recall the exact year they began trading, however, it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and throughout the pandemic years.

Reflexive Discussion

The researchers' interest in this topic emerged from observing the visible economic struggles experienced by women informal traders during and after the COVID-19 lockdown period in Mthatha. As a psychology student exposed to community-based realities of poverty, unemployment and gendered caregiving burdens, the researcher became interested in understanding how women informal traders navigated crises conditions with limited institutional support.

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher expected participants to describe financial hardship and emotional distress associated with lockdown restrictions. However, the interviews also revealed unexpected dimensions of resilience, humour, solidarity and adaptive survival strategies among participants.

The researcher remained aware that personal empathy toward economically vulnerable women could shape interpretation of the findings. To minimise bias, the researcher relied on verbatim quotations, field notes and continuous reflection throughout the analytic process to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives rather than personal assumptions.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed using orthographic notation. This transcription method captures all verbal expressions, including instances of hesitation, speech interruptions, laughter, prolonged pauses, and significant emphasis, as outlined by Kiger and Varpio (2020). Inductive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006,2022), guided data analysis of the interview transcripts. Although phenomenological studies frequently employ Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis(IPA),this study adopted thematic analysis because the aim was to identify and analyse shared patterns of meaning across participants experiences rather than to develop detailed idiographic interpretations of individual lived experiences.The study sought to understand common experiences, coping mechanisms and psychosocial challenges across a group of female street vendors,making thematic analysis more appropriate than IPA, which focuses on the Braun and Clarke(2006) further argue that thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible method that can be effectively applied within different qualitative research paradigms, including phenomenology. A step-by-step process was followed to review and refine themes:

Familiarisation with the data: After the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings were listened to repeatedly, and the transcripts were read several times to become fully familiar with the content. Initial notes were made in the margins to capture early impressions, recurring ideas, and emotionally significant statements.

Generating initial codes: The researcher systematically reviewed each transcript and highlighted meaningful segments. Short labels (codes) were assigned to these segments to capture what participants were saying (e.g., loss of income, fear of police, feeding children, borrowing money, faith as coping). Coding was performed across the entire dataset, and similar codes were grouped into patterns as they emerged.

Collating codes and identifying patterns: Codes were then compared across all transcripts to identify repetition and shared experiences. Codes referring to similar issues were clustered, and broader patterns were identified. This helped the researcher begin moving from descriptive coding toward more interpretive categories.

Searching for preliminary themes: The clustered codes were organised into tentative themes. At this stage, the researcher asked: *Which codes seem to belong together?*

What bigger idea do they represent? Codes that captured different aspects of the same experience were grouped under a single theme. Sub-themes were also drafted, each containing distinct but related parts.

Reviewing themes against the dataset: Themes were reviewed by returning to the transcripts and checking whether each theme was supported by sufficient evidence across participants. The researcher examined whether the coded extracts within each theme fit together meaningfully and whether the theme accurately represented participants' accounts.

Refining and revising theme structure: Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, internal consistency, and analytic depth. Some themes were merged where overlap was too strong, while others were split when the content was too broad. Certain codes were moved to different themes when they fit better elsewhere. Weak or insufficiently supported themes were revised or removed.

Defining and naming themes: After refinement, each theme was clearly defined in terms of what it captured and why it was important to the research questions. Themes and sub-themes were given concise, descriptive names that reflected their meaning and analytic focus.

Producing the final thematic narrative: The final step involved writing up the findings by presenting each theme with supporting quotations from participants. The write-up connected themes back to the research questions and interpreted them using the study's theoretical framework (e.g., coping theory, feminist theory, and the informal sector framework), ensuring that the analysis went beyond description to meaning and interpretation (See Appendix G).

No independent co-coder was used in this study. However, credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced through repeated reading of transcripts, detailed field notes, consistent comparison between participants' quotations and emerging themes, and continuous reflection throughout the analytic process. The researcher remained attentive ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' lived experiences rather than personal assumptions or expectations.

3.6.1 Example of the Coding and Theme Development Process

Participant Quote	Initial Code	Category	Theme
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'sizodla ni' (what will we eat)	Fear of hunger	Economic insecurity	Experiences during lockdown
'Sasi wabaleka amapolisa'(we ran away from the police)	Fear of police	Policing experiences	Experiences during lockdown
'Abantwana bazotya ntoni'(what will our children eat)	Caregiving pressure	Family responsibility	Coping Mechanisms
'Sasi dinga abantu bothetha'(we needed people to talk to us)	Need emotional support	Psychosocial support	Need for professional support
"Ndandi soloko ndixhalabile" (I was constantly worried)	Anxiety and worry	Emotional Distress	Psychological Distress and Mental Health Responses
"Urhulumente wasithembisa kodwa akazange asincede" (the government promised us help but never assisted us)	Distrust of Authorities	Perceived Neglect	Perceptions of Inequality, Distrust and Pandemic.
"Ndisahlawula amatyala ukusukela	Ongoing debt Burden	Financial recovery struggles	Long-term financial Consequences

ngexesha le-lockdown" (I am still paying debts from the lockdown period)			and Recovery Struggles
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3.7 REFLEXIVITY AND POSITIONALITY

Reflexivity is critical in qualitative research, particularly within constructivist paradigms (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity acknowledges that the researcher is not neutral but situated within social, cultural and professional contexts.

The researcher reflects on her positionality as a South African woman engaging with economically marginalised female vendors. While shared cultural and linguistic backgrounds facilitated rapport, the researcher remained mindful of potential power differentials associated with educational status and institutional affiliation.

A reflexive journal was maintained throughout data collection and analysis to document personal assumptions, emotional reactions, and interpretive decisions. This journal served as a self-monitoring tool to ensure that themes were grounded in participants' narratives rather than in the researcher's bias.

Reflexivity and Fieldwork Experience

The fieldwork process reflected both cooperation and ambivalence, which is typical in economically strained contexts where participants have been repeatedly approached by researchers and external stakeholders without receiving tangible benefits. Within the informal economy, street vendors often operate under conditions of structural marginalisation and limited institutional recognition, which may contribute to scepticism toward external actors (Chen, 2012). While access to the trading sites was generally feasible, participant receptiveness varied, and the researcher had to negotiate ethical engagement carefully to avoid reinforcing expectations of material reward. Several participants asked directly whether participation would result in incentives, municipal assistance or access to relief programmes. These questions were not merely transactional; rather, they reflected broader patterns of perceived neglect and limited state support experienced by informal workers, particularly women,

whose labour remains economically essential yet socially undervalued (Rogan & Skinner, 2020). From a feminist perspective, such responses can be understood as rooted in gendered economic precarity and historical exclusion from formal systems of protection, where interactions with institutions are often associated with unmet promises or episodic intervention rather than sustained support (Chen, 2012).

Trust-related concerns were also significant during recruitment. Some participants were hesitant to share biographical information, expressing anxiety that personal details could expose them to exploitation or unauthorized financial deductions, reflecting broader experiences of vulnerability and mistrust in everyday life. Such concerns are consistent with literature highlighting the structural insecurity and limited institutional protection faced by informal workers, particularly women operating within marginalised economic spaces (Chen, 2012; Rogan & Skinner, 2020). In response, the researcher reinforced confidentiality, clarified that no identity numbers were required, and explained that pseudonyms would be used in all reporting. Once these boundaries were established, participants generally engaged more openly, suggesting that ethical transparency and consistency helped to reduce anxiety and supported more authentic narratives (ILO, 2020).

Participants' affect and engagement differed markedly across interviews. Some traders displayed emotional withdrawal, sarcasm or disinterest, which appeared linked to accumulated frustration, economic strain and feelings of being overlooked by authorities. Others were enthusiastic and used the interviews as an opportunity to articulate aspirations and to reflect on the meaning of their work beyond immediate income. These contrasting responses are analytically significant because they reveal that 'female street vendors' are not a uniform group; instead, participants occupy diverse emotional and socio-economic positions shaped by age, health, household responsibility and trading history. Methodologically, these variations also demonstrate the need for flexibility in qualitative research, as engagement levels may shift depending on context, trust, and participants perceived burdens.

Logistical constraints further shaped the research process. Scheduling interviews in advance often proved difficult because participants' availability depended on customer flow, weather conditions and daily unpredictability. As a result, on-site engagement was sometimes more effective than planned follow-ups. Additionally, the spatial proximity of stalls required sensitivity: approaching traders too closely together risked

discomfort or social tension, particularly if sensitive topics were discussed within earshot. The fieldwork, therefore, required context-awareness and strategic movement through the trading space to protect privacy and preserve respectful interaction.

The researcher's interest in the study emerged from a concern for economically vulnerable populations whose experiences are often overlooked within formal research and policy discussions. Prior to data collection, the researcher anticipated that participants would primarily emphasise financial hardship and loss of income resulting from the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. However, as interviews progressed, it became evident that participants also attached significant meaning to caregiving responsibilities, emotional distress, faith-based coping and experiences of social exclusion. The researcher remained mindful that personal assumptions regarding vulnerability and hardship could influence data interpretation. Consequently, reflexive journalling, regular review of transcripts and continual comparison of emerging themes against participants' accounts were used to minimise bias and ensure that findings remained grounded in the data rather than the researcher's expectations.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness was enhanced through credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility was strengthened by providing honest, detailed accounts of data collection and presenting findings that reflected participants' realities (Liao, 2018; Stahl & King, 2020). Credibility was further supported through member checking and careful use of direct quotations to demonstrate alignment between themes and participant narratives. Member checking was conducted after transcription. Selected participants were invited to review portions of their interview transcripts and clarify meanings where necessary. The process assisted in verifying the accuracy of participants accounts and ensured that interpretations remained consistent with their intended meaning.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability was supported through thick description, which involved detailed reporting of the study context, participants, setting and data collection processes (Shaffer, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). Demographic and contextual details were included without compromising anonymity to allow readers to assess the potential relevance of findings to other contexts.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability was addressed by promoting consistency in data collection and analysis procedures over time. Member checking was used with selected participants to verify transcript accuracy and reduce misinterpretation (McKim, 2023). Participants reviewed portions of the data and had the opportunity to correct errors or remove any information they did not want to include.

Reflexivity was incorporated to acknowledge and bracket the researcher's assumptions, values, and potential biases during the research process (Ramsook, 2018). The researcher reflected positionality and documented potential influences on interpretation.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability was enhanced by ensuring that findings were grounded in the data and could be traced back to participant accounts (Nyathi, 2018). Raw data (audio recordings and transcripts) were securely stored and maintained to support auditability and transparency.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were carefully upheld throughout the study to protect participants' dignity, rights, and well-being, and to ensure responsible research conduct.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of South Africa (UNISA) prior to data collection (Appendix A). Institutional approval ensured that the research procedures were reviewed for compliance with ethical standards relating to participant protection, risk management and data security. In addition, consent to conduct the research at the Golden Egg Taxi Rank (Appendix B) was granted prior to the commencement of data collection.

Ethical research requires that studies involving human participants adhere to principles such as respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Arifin, 2018; Resnik, 2020). In qualitative research, particular attention must be given to voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and minimising potential harm, especially when working with economically vulnerable populations. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the potential risks and benefits, and the measures in place to ensure confidentiality. They were also informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw at any stage without negative consequences (Appendix D). Providing participants with clear information about their involvement in research (Arifin, 2018; Resnik, 2020) is essential in research.

3.9.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is the process through which participants voluntarily confirm their willingness to participate after receiving adequate information about the study (World Medical Association, 2013). In this study, written informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews commenced (see Appendix E). Consent forms were provided in both English and isiXhosa to ensure linguistic accessibility and comprehension. Prior to recording, the researcher verbally explained the interview process, the use of audio-recording equipment and how the data would be used. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify concerns before signing the consent form.

3.9.2 Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation is a fundamental ethical requirement in social research and ensures that individuals participate without coercion, pressure, or undue influence (Resnik, 2020). Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions at any stage without any negative consequences. No financial inducements were offered that could have compromised voluntariness. This was particularly important given the economic vulnerability of street vendors.

3.9.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality involves safeguarding participants' information and ensuring that data is not disclosed in ways that could identify them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Anonymity refers to the removal of identifying information so that individuals cannot be personally linked to the data presented (Resnik, 2020).

To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and in the reporting of findings. Identifying details such as exact stall locations, specific family information, and other unique descriptors were removed from transcripts to prevent deductive disclosure. In addition, a numbering system (for example, Participant 01; Participant 02) was used when organising interview data. Data were stored securely on a password-protected device and will be retained for five years in accordance with institutional guidelines before secure destruction.

3.9.4 Privacy

Privacy refers to participants' control over access to themselves, their personal information and their lived experiences (World Medical Association, 2013). Interviews were conducted in participants' working environments. While the taxi-rank setting was public, the researcher positioned interviews strategically to minimise exposure, reduce interruptions and ensure participant comfort. Care was taken not to conduct interviews near customers or fellow traders when sensitive topics were discussed. Participants were asked whether they felt comfortable proceeding before the interview commenced.

3.9.5 Avoidance of Harm

The principle of beneficence requires researchers to minimise potential harm and maximise possible benefits (Arifin, 2018). Discussing economic hardship, food insecurity and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, could have evoked emotional distress. The researcher remained attentive to verbal and non-verbal signs of discomfort throughout the interviews. Where distress emerged, interviews were paused, and participants were given space to compose themselves. Participants were informed of available psychosocial support services should they wish to seek further assistance. A registered social worker had made her services available for this specific purpose, should participants experience any distress (see Appendix C).

The study sought to minimise harm by creating a respectful, non-judgemental interview space and by emphasising participants' autonomy in choosing what to disclose. While direct personal benefit to participants could not be guaranteed, the study aimed to contribute knowledge that may inform policy development, professional psychosocial interventions and improved support strategies for female street vendors in crisis contexts.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter described the research methodology employed to explore the lived experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in the Eastern Cape Province. The chapter provided a detailed account of the research paradigm, design, and methodological procedures that guided the empirical component of the study.

Positioned within a constructivist- interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative research approach to gain in-depth insight into participants' subjective experiences. An interpretive phenomenological qualitative design was utilised to capture the complexities of economic vulnerability, gendered responsibility, and coping processes within the informal trading context. Purposive sampling was used to recruit female street vendors operating in and around the selected trading area. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, enabling flexibility while ensuring that key areas aligned with the research questions were addressed.

The chapter further described the thematic data analysis process, detailing how transcripts were coded, organised into categories, and refined into coherent themes. Measures to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, were clearly outlined. Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy, and minimisation of harm.

Overall, this chapter demonstrated that the research design was appropriate and aligned with the study's aims and theoretical framework. The methodological choices provided a systematic and ethically grounded approach for the presentation and interpretation of findings in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and interprets the empirical findings generated through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with female street vendors operating in and around the Mthatha Plaza area in the OR Tambo District Municipality, Eastern Cape. It builds directly on Chapter 3, which outlined the qualitative phenomenological design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and the approach to thematic analysis. In line with the study's purpose, the chapter answers the research questions by foregrounding participants' lived experiences during COVID-19 lockdowns, the emotional and livelihood impacts of the pandemic, and the coping strategies they adopted in response to disruptions in their trading activities and household economies.

The primary aim of the study was to explore the diverse experiences and coping strategies employed by female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during COVID-19 restrictions. Given that informal trading is often a survival-based economic activity deeply intertwined with caregiving responsibilities and gendered household roles (Mukamba et al., 2024), the findings are presented with attention to how structural conditions (such as lockdown regulations, policing practices, and reduced commuter movement) interact with women's agency, resilience, and relational coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This is particularly important in secondary cities such as Mthatha, where informal economic activity is a key livelihood strategy but often receives limited institutional protection during crises (Chen, 2012).

The chapter is structured as follows. It begins with a demographic and livelihood profile of participants to contextualise the findings. This is followed by a brief overview of the research process and the analytic approach used to generate themes. The main body of the chapter then presents the themes and sub-themes, supported by participant quotations and interpretive commentary. The chapter concludes with a cross-theme interpretation that integrates the findings with the study's theoretical framework, followed by a chapter summary that bridges to Chapter 5.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The findings presented in this chapter are based on interviews conducted with 11 participants street vendors operating within the Mthatha Plaza area. Participants varied in age, trading experience and household responsibilities, providing a diverse range of perspectives on the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Detailed demographic information is presented in Chapter 3.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The findings presented below emerged from inductive thematic analysis discussed in Chapter 3. Six themes were identified from the interview data and are presented with supporting participants quotations and interpretive commentary.

Table 4.1: Themes and descriptions of thematic focus

Themes	Description of Thematic Focus	Linked to Research Question
1. Experiences during the COVID-19 Lockdown Restrictions	Participants' immediate emotional reactions to the Level 5 lockdown, disruptions to trading activities, adaptive survival strategies, interactions with law enforcement, and uneven economic outcomes during the pandemic.	Main RQ: What were the experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?
2. Coping Mechanisms Adopted During Lockdown and Disruption	Emotional regulation strategies, peer solidarity among vendors, caregiving responsibilities as motivation, and meaning-making processes used to manage uncertainty and hardship.	RQ1: What coping mechanisms did female street vendors use during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?
3. Need for Professional, Informational, and Material Support	Participants expressed a need for psychosocial support, clearer health communication, material aid (food parcels), and financial relief measures.	RQ3: What psychosocial support did female street vendors require from professionals when in distress?
4. Perceptions of Inequality, Distrust, and Pandemic Fatigue	Women's interpretations of institutional responses, perceived inequality in support distribution, frustration with unmet promises,	Main RQ: What were the experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?

Themes	Description of Thematic Focus	Linked to Research Question
	and growing emotional and political fatigue.	
5. Psychological Distress and Mental Health Responses	Observed emotional withdrawal, signs of distress, depressive features, resilience contrasts, and the mental health consequences of prolonged economic insecurity.	RQ2: What challenges were experienced by female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during the lockdown restrictions?
6. Long-term Financial Consequences and Economic Recovery Struggles	Ongoing debt, disrupted stokvel and burial society contributions, reliance on social grants, and sustained livelihood precarity following the easing of lockdown restrictions.	Main RQ: What were the experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?

4.3.1 Theme 1: Experiences during the COVID-19 Lockdown Restrictions

This section reports on participants' immediate emotional reactions to the Level 5 lockdown, disruptions to trading activities, adaptive survival strategies, interactions with law enforcement, and uneven economic outcomes during the pandemic.

Sub-theme a: Emotional Responses to the Sudden Lockdown

Participants described the Level 5 lockdown announcement as an abrupt disruption that immediately threatened their ability to secure income and provide for their households. Initial reactions were characterized by shock, disbelief, fear, and anxiety about survival.

Ma'm Bulelwa stated, "*Sasi cinga kuya dlalwa*," meaning they thought it was a joke, reflecting disbelief at the announcement. Similarly, Ma'm Grace responded, "*sizodla'ni, sizodla'ni!*" translated as "*what will we eat, what will we eat?*", immediately centring on hunger as her primary concern.

Ma'm Londiwe expressed fear but emphasised economic desperation: "*yayiso thusa yona ngala ndlela kwaku senzeka ngayo, intwenani sasi xakiwe kuba asinanto*," meaning that although it was scary how things were happening, they were also troubled because they had nothing to survive on.

Mam'Qhawekazi similarly said, "*ndiyoyika kodwa andina choice, andina myeni, wasweleka. Kunyanzelekile ndithengise,*" translating to: I was scared, but I had no choice, I don't have a husband, he died, I have to sell.

Ma'm Beauty showed slight indifference with regards to any emotions of the lockdown, stating, "*Wawuye ubone ukuba uyo bona ngoko, abantwana balambile,*" translated to; whatever happens will happen, but the children are hungry.

These accounts demonstrate that the lockdown was primarily viewed as an economic threat rather than solely a health crisis. Within Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), this reflects primary appraisal of threat to livelihood, followed by rapid secondary appraisal of limited coping resources (Lazarus, 1999). The daily-income nature of informal trading meant that staying at home automatically translated into hunger and instability. This aligns with Chen (2012) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2018), who note that informal workers lack income protection and are particularly vulnerable during economic disruptions.

From a Marxist feminist perspective, the repeated emphasis on hunger illustrates structurally produced vulnerability. Women's economic activities are embedded in caregiving responsibilities, positioning them closer to the edge of household food insecurity (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012). South African studies similarly revealed that informal workers experienced abrupt income loss during the hard lockdown, intensifying livelihood insecurity (Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

Other participants initially complied due to fear of infection; however, compliance was unstable.

Ma'm Vuyiseka stated, "*Sasi sebisa,*" meaning they traded discreetly to avoid police detection.

This suggests that fear of infection coexisted with survival pressures, and decisions were continuously recalculated rather than fixed.

In contrast, Sis Thembi expressed fatalism: "*ayizelanga mna tyhini,*" implying that the virus was not meant for her. Such framing may function as emotion-focused coping through meaning-making (Baqtayan, 2015), allowing continued trading despite risk. Across accounts, hunger was consistently positioned as a more immediate threat than infection, reflecting how poverty shapes risk perception and narrows perceived safe choices.

Sub-theme b: Lived Experiences of Trading Under Lockdown Conditions

Participants described trading during hard lockdown as requiring adaptive and often covert strategies. Women spoke about concealing goods in bags, moving instead of remaining in fixed stalls, and relying on discreet communication networks.

Mam'Sindiswa explained, “sasi faka izinto zethu ebagini, sisehla siso nyuka,” indicating that they placed goods in bags and moved around while quietly selling items.

These strategies demonstrate both creativity and constraint; while participants displayed resilience, their survival practices also reflected how restrictions effectively criminalized informal livelihood activity.

Some participants acknowledged selling prohibited items.

Mam'Siziwe stated, “*haiy mna ibusiness yayi hamba kakuhle, ndandithengisa icuba nge R10 ifag enye,*” translating to: no, my business was doing well because I sold a single cigarette for R10.

Similarly, Ma'm Grace admitted, “*icuba lalithengwa ngoba lali nqabile. Ungatsho, ungahabi usitsho (laughs). Haiy abantu babe lithenga shame,*” meaning cigarettes were bought because they were scarce, while humorously asking the researcher not to report her.

These accounts illustrate moral tension within survival contexts, where legality was weighed against urgent household needs. Rather than simple ‘rule-breaking’, these actions reflect adaptation within constrained structural conditions. Informal Economy Theory helps interpret strategies such as structural adaptation under exclusion (Abebe, 2017; Williams, 2017), in which regulations removed legal trading routes without providing alternatives. This aligns with findings that lockdown regulations severely disrupted informal livelihoods and forced altered trading practices (Raniga & Ringson, 2022).

The sale of prohibited goods further reflects the informal economy functioning as a ‘buffer zone’ during crisis, where risk is shifted onto workers at the margins (Chen, 2012; Fraser, 2016).

Sub-theme c: Interactions with Law Enforcement and Perceived Policing Practices

Participants reported that law enforcement shaped their trading experiences during lockdown, even where direct confrontation did not always occur. Women described policing as uneven, strategic and unpredictable, influencing how and where they traded.

As Ma'm Bulelwa explained, "*aye khona amapolisa kodwa enga senzinto thina, aye garde onoTaxi*," meaning the police were present but focused on taxi drivers rather than street vendors.

Although some participants did not experience direct harassment, the presence of enforcement altered their mobility, reduced commuter flow and disrupted sales.

However, another participant described more direct exposure.

Mam'Nozibele (Thembi) stated, "*sasi wabaleka amapolisa*," meaning they ran away from the police.

Similarly, Mam'Grace noted, "*sasi sebisa, amapolisa ayekhona, kodwa sasi wabaleka*," indicating that they traded discreetly and ran when police were visible.

These accounts suggest that compliance was often strategic rather than trust-based. Even where overt harassment was not constant, enforcement created an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. Women's trading decisions were shaped by risk management rather than voluntary agreement with regulations. This reflects street-vending scholarship, which shows that informal traders frequently experience governance through surveillance and disruption rather than support (Roever & Skinner, 2016; Skinner & Watson, 2018). The disproportionate nature of enforcement described by participants, also supports findings that regulation in the informal is often experienced as inconsistent (Skinner & Watson, 2028).

Sub-theme d: Differential Economic Outcomes During the Pandemic

Participants' economic experiences during lockdown were varied. While some participants described severe income decline, others reported short-term gains resulting from changing consumer behaviour.

Ma'm Zola stated, "*abantu babethenga ngezinye imini ngoba abafuni yoma kwi-Que zase sivenkileni*," meaning customers preferred buying from street vendors to avoid queues in formal shops.

This suggests that informal trade was sometimes perceived as a safer or more convenient option during the pandemic.

A striking example was Mam'Londiwe, who identified increased demand for items believed to offer protection against COVID-19.

Mam'Londiwe, stated, “*yayi thengwa nyhani iponyo-ponyo ngela xhesha, yayi thengwa nyhani*,” indicating that avocados sold well during that time.

She further explained, “*Sasi thengisa thina, zange silambe*,” meaning she sold their goods and never went hungry. She adapted by sourcing goods from her village in Port St. Johns (another town near Mthatha) and relocating to a bus depot to reach customers arriving from other provinces.

These accounts demonstrate that resilience was not only psychological but also resource based. Access to supply networks, product knowledge and flexible trading locations shaped differential outcomes. This aligns with literature indicating that the informal sector is internally stratified and crises amplify existing inequalities rather than affecting all traders equally (Bonnet et al., 2019; Chen, 2012). South African evidence similarly shows disparate recovery patterns among informal workers, shaped by gendered constraints and limited support mechanisms (Casale & Shepherd, 2021; Rogan & Skinner, 2022).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Female Street Vendors

Theme 2 relates to emotional regulation strategies, peer solidarity among vendors, caregiving responsibilities as motivation, and meaning-making processes are used to manage uncertainty and hardship.

Participants described coping as both relational and responsibility driven. Women emphasised social interaction with other vendors as an important emotional resource during lockdown. Sharing information, talking through fears, and even laughing together helped reduce anxiety in a context where formal psychosocial support was limited.

Ma'm Qhawekazi expressed: *sasi ngathethi namntu, ndandifane ndize emsebenzini, sifike sicokole sihleke ngalonto*, stating: we did not speak to many people during lockdown, but when we came to work, we would talk and laugh together about the COVID-19 restrictions.

Participants' coping strategies reflected both emotion-focused and problem-focused mechanisms (Baqtayan, 2015; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotional regulation occurred through shared meaning-making and peer connection, while practical coping involved adapting trading strategies and seeking alternative income opportunities.

Peer solidarity served as an informal emotional buffer, aligning with the literature on the role of social capital in resource-constrained environments (Bonnet et al., 2019; Skinner & Watson, 2018). However, these networks had limited capacity to provide long-term economic security.

Family responsibilities also emerged as central to coping. Motherhood functioned as a psychological anchor, shaping decisions about risk and endurance.

Mam'Sindiswa laughed while saying, "asoze ndihlale ekhaya tyhini, abantwana bazotya ntoni," meaning she could not remain home because her children needed to eat. Ma'm Beauty also reiterating that "*Wawuye ubone ukuba uyo bona ngoko, abantwana balambile*" translating to you will see then, the children are hungry.

Ma'm Nobright expressed tensely when asked why she did not comply with COVID-19 restrictions "*HEYI, ndinabantwana mna, bendingazu kwazi uhlala ndikhalelwa ngabantwana ukuba bazotya ntoni*", Hey, I have children, I could not afford to stay at home while my children had no food, wondering what are they going to eat.

Ma'm Vuyiseka further elaborated around the theme of family responsibility as a coping mechanism. She emphasized "*akukho mntu ozoku ncedisa eku hoyeni abantwana bakho. Sinyanzela sishukume siyo jongela abantwana bethu*" relayed as: no one is going to help you take care of your children; we are forced to have to go look for ways to take care of our children.

These statements reflect how caregiving obligations generate urgency and determination. From a feminist perspective, this reinforces the argument that women's economic participation is inseparable from social reproduction responsibilities (Bhattacharya, 2017; Chant, 2014; Federici, 2012). South African evidence further shows that women informal traders often had fewer economic buffers, making coping largely necessity-driven rather than choice-based (Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

4.3.3 Theme 3: Need for Professional, Informational and Material Support

Participants expressed strong expectations that institutions and professionals should have played a more visible and supportive role during and after the pandemic. Their narratives clustered around three primary needs: psychosocial support, information, and material assistance.

Participants highlighted psychosocial strain and the need for emotional support, particularly in relation to stress and chronic illness. Mam'Siziwe linked her emotional burden to physical health concerns and suggested that speaking to professionals would have provided relief.

Mam'Siziwe said "*Ewe khona sasiba dinga abantu bothetha, ngoba mna ndiya gula, ezinye izinto zenziwa kungabikho right emoyeni*", translating to; yes, we needed someone to talk to, because I am sick, other things (illness) are caused by not being okay emotionally.

Mam Bulelwa who had contracted COVID shared the same sentiments: "*Sasi badinga abantu bothetha, ngoba mna ndine high-high, mhlambi ngekube kwancono*", translating to: we needed people to talk to, because I have high blood pressure, maybe it would have been better.

Her statement indicates that participants viewed emotional well-being and physical health as interconnected. Emotional support was framed not as a luxury but as a legitimate and necessary form of assistance. This aligns with South African mental health literature, which highlights significant gaps in structured psychosocial services for economically vulnerable communities (Lund et al., 2011; Patel et al., 2011).

Participants also emphasised informational exclusion. They described feeling left out of formal communication efforts and lacking accessible, practical guidance about prevention and protection.

Mam'Sindiswa stated: "*Kubekhona abantu abane ndlela yothetha. Ufundiswa kubalulekile. Umzekelo sasi sebenzisa iziziba ngoba imasks zasi thengiswa evenkileni. Uxhaswa, ufundiswa yayinto yayi balulekile ngokuya*". Directly translated to: I wish there were people who could talk; being taught is important.

For example; we used old clothes because we had no masks, they were sold at the stores. Being supported and being taught were important during that time.

This reflects a desire for engagement, education and inclusion. Participants felt they were expected to comply with regulations without adequate support or communication. This supports the Chapter 2 literature, which demonstrates that informal workers are often regulated without corresponding protection or inclusion in relief frameworks (Chen, 2012; ILO, 2018). During COVID-19, this gap became more visible as informal traders experienced income cessation without tailored relief (ILO, 2020; Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

Despite these various needs, the dominant request across accounts was material support, particularly food parcels and financial relief. Participants repeatedly positioned hunger as more immediate than infection. The R350 relief grant was described as insufficient, especially for women responsible for rent and dependents.

Mam Nozibele stated *“Igrant yabantwana incinci, kwa ezi R350 soze zisonele, babenosi nika imali nokutya ngeku ncono”*. This translated to: the social grants for children are small; even R350 can’t be enough. If you guys could give us money and food, things would be better. Mam Nobright shared these sentiments, *“sasi dinga imali le yothenga ukutya, okoba sitye”*, translating to: we needed money to buy food, just to eat.

This mirrors findings that food insecurity significantly increased among informal workers during lockdown, with relief mechanisms proving limited and unevenly accessed (Casale & Shepherd, 2021; Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

4.3.4 Theme 4: Perceptions of Inequality, Distrust and Pandemic Fatigue

Women’s interpretations of institutional responses include perceived inequality in support distribution, frustration with unmet promises, and growing emotional and political fatigue. Participants frequently framed COVID-19 as disproportionately affecting wealthier groups. They described minimal visible illness in their immediate communities and interpreted this through socio-economic lenses.

Mam’Sindiswa stated: *“yayi ketha abantu abane mali abakwazi uzisa isonka etafuleni, thina singenayo yayi ngasi kethi. Yayi ngathi ikhonjiwe kwabantu abane mali... Thina sasi sebenzisa umhlonyana, igumtree. Yayi yezi tyebi.”* This statement reflects how participants interpreted vulnerability through socio-economic position. What Mam Sindiswa had expressed was: it (COVID) chose people who had money, who could put bread on the table, we who did not have, it didn’t choose us. It was as though it

(COVID) was directed towards people who have money. We used wormwood. It was for the rich.

Mam'Sindiswa's account reflects how participants interpreted vulnerability through socio-economic position. She suggested that COVID-19 appeared to affect wealthier individuals more severely, while poorer communities perceived themselves as less vulnerable to infection. Participants repeatedly prioritized hunger and economic survival over fear of illness, illustrating how structural poverty shaped perceptions of risk during the pandemic. Mam'Sindiswa also referred to the use of traditional remedies such as wormwood (umhlonyana) and eucalyptus (gumtrees) to manage respiratory symptoms associated with COVID-19. These remedies were commonly used within local communities to relieve congestion, chest tightness and flu-like symptoms through steaming, inhalation or herbal teas. Reliance on indigenous remedies reflects both economic constraint and the continued significance of local knowledge systems during periods of limited healthcare access and uncertainty. Within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) framework, these practices may also be understood as emotion-focused coping strategies that helped participants regain a sense of control during crises conditions.

Similarly, Mam'Grace remarked: "iCOVID yayi hambele abantu abafundileyo, thina nestreet kid sise khona, sisa phelele." This statement reflects that the participant may have understood the COVID to target people who are educated. We, and the street children, are still here.

These accounts reflect perceptions shaped by lived visibility. Where hunger and survival pressures were immediate and illness less visible in one's network, infection could be interpreted as distant. Within the Transactional Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this shapes primary appraisal: if hunger is perceived as more threatening than infection, continued trading becomes rational within constrained choices.

Distrust toward institutions was also evident. Mam'Zola stated: *"zange safumana kwancedo, njengoku nangoku kungekho ncedo esilifumanayo. Zange safumana ncedo ngoku sibuyileyo. Bebephi ono nhlalanhle ngoko."* This translated to: we never received any help, and even now, no one is helping us. We never received help, even now that we are back (selling items). Where were the social workers then?

Mam Zola expressed this after the researcher asked her, "How would they have wanted professionals to support them during the pandemic?"

Mam Zola further asked sarcastically, "*kunini ngoku... mhhh?*" when reminded that COVID-19 occurred in 2020, illustrating frustration and emotional fatigue.

Mam Londiwe (the eldest of the participants) stated that she too was tired of empty promises and sceptical about receiving help from authorities. She said "*Oko umaspala wasithembisa ngokusi nceda, nangoku aka kayenzi lonto. Usuke afune imali yo'renta kwalapha kuni. Abanye omaspala bayaba nceda abantu babo ngezinto ezi fana ne Umbrella*". Since the municipality promised to help us, it has not done so. Instead, they want us to pay them rent (to sell). Other municipalities help their people with things like umbrellas.

These statements reflect exhaustion tied to unmet promises and perceived abandonment. Informal economy scholarship shows that informal traders often experience the state primarily through enforcement rather than support (Roever & Skinner, 2016; Skinner & Watson, 2018). South African evidence also points to disproportionate access to relief contributing to perceptions of inequality (Rogan & Skinner, 2022). Pandemic fatigue in this context, therefore, appears not only psychological, but relational and politically grounded in repeated experiences of exclusion and unmet expectations (Rogan & Skinner, 2022).

4.3.5 Theme 5: Psychological Distress and Mental Health Responses

Marked differences in emotional well-being were observed across participants such as emotional withdrawal, signs of distress, depressive features, resilience contrasts, and the mental health consequences of prolonged economic insecurity. Some women displayed withdrawal, monotone responses, limited engagement, and signs consistent with emotional exhaustion.

Mam'Zola said: "*Sidiniwe kuthenjiswa, soze nisenzele kwanto. Siyazi zamela thina*". Mam'Zola's account reflected frustration, hopelessness and distrust toward institutional support. From the previous chapter, she was sarcastic and displayed disinterest. Her words translated: We are tired of being promised, you will never do anything for us. We fend for ourselves.

Sis Vuyiseka also stated: "*Kuyafana, akukho mntu onomdla wosi nceda. Ngezinye imini kunzima kakhulu. Uvele unga yazi noba uthini*". This was translated to: It's the same;

no one has any interest in helping us (hopelessness). Some days are really hard. You just don't know what to do. Mam Beauty said that" *mntanam, ayibo bomi obu sibuphilayo, kodwa siginya noba kuya krakra*. Translating to: my child, what we are living isn't life; we swallow even when it's hard.

Mam' Bulewliwa, who had contracted COVID, noted:" *ndiyagula,umzekelo izolo kange ndiphangela ngoba bendine fever. Akululanga ukuza apha yonke imihla. Uvele unga yazi noba uthini, ngoba funa wondlile*". Translating to; I am sick, yesterday I didn't come to work because I had a fever. It's not easy coming here every day. You just don't know what to do, because you must provide. The researcher noted that as she narrated, she seemed hopeless of ever escaping having to vendor, implying that her sickness could be linked to having to come to the streets every day.

These presentations suggest psychological strain linked to prolonged economic insecurity and perceived neglect. Consistent with Chapter 2 literature, sustained financial uncertainty is associated with psychological distress (Lund et al., 2011; Posel et al., 2021). Within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) framework, prolonged stress may occur when ongoing demands exceed available coping resources.

From a Marxist feminist lens, such distress should be interpreted within structural conditions rather than individual deficit. Gendered economic vulnerability and caregiving burdens intensify psychological strain (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016).

In contrast, Mam'Grace displayed optimism and openness to growth opportunities. Mam'Grace said: "*Yoh mnwana mna ndiyafuna ufunda, ndiyakuthanda ufunda,ukuba ibusiness ibino Phinda iqhube kakuhle ngenga phambile. Ndingake ndiyo kwenza icourse*", meaning: Yoh child, I want to study, I love education. If business were like the past (prior to COVID) and continue like the past, I would do a course.

This contrast demonstrates that psychological responses were not uniform. Distress and hope coexisted within the same structural environment, shaped by variation in perceived agency, social support and resource access (Rogan & Skinner, 2022).

4.3.6 Theme 6: Long-term Financial Consequences of the Pandemic

Participants described enduring financial consequences extending beyond the strict lockdown. Women reported falling behind on stokvel contributions, burial society payments and monthly obligations, with some entering debt that persisted after

restrictions eased. Participants relied on social grants resulting in sustained livelihood precarity

Mam Qhawekazi said, *“imibutho ayibathaleki ngoba asisebenzi, funa siboleke imali, phof wonke umntu akana mali. Uthi uyithatha phi. Ufana nawe lo. Bekuyi lonto”*, translating to: policies can't be paid because we do not work, we must borrow money. Actually, not everyone has money. Where do you expect them to get money from? They are like you (people don't have money). The participant was describing "You can try to borrow money from people, but not everyone around has money because of the COVID restrictions."

Ma'm Beauty also shared her experience of financial strain:

“Bekungekho nomntu onokupha imali, ngoba ngoku nomnakwenu akanakupha ne Cent. Ubuzama imali yokutya qha, imibutho sayeka ukuyi bhatala”. This translated to: not a single person could give you money because not even your own brother could give you a cent. You tried to get money only for food; we stopped paying for policies (9 policies lapsed).

Mam Londiwe expressed: *“noba beninosinika noba yiR500. Ngoku lo mali ubuyenza ngusuka ayseko. Kodwa uthengisa umhlonyana nezinto zeCOVID zindincedile. Khange ndingene ematyaleni kakhulu”*. Even if you were to give us R500. The amount we once earned in a single day was no longer possible to make during that period. But selling wormwood and these COVID remedies helped. I didn't get into too much debt.

For the traders who were dependent on daily income, even short-term disruption had negative effects on financial stability. Participants' narratives demonstrate that lockdown deepened existing precarity rather than creating entirely new vulnerability. This aligns with the informal economy literature, which highlights the sensitivity of daily-income livelihoods to economic shocks (Chen, 2012; ILO, 2018).

South African evidence further indicates that recovery among informal workers has been disparate and, in many cases, stalled (Rogan & Skinner, 2022). Disruption of stokvel and burial society contributions also reflects erosion of informal social safety nets (Bonnet et al., 2019). When these networks weaken, coping capacity declines and reliance on debt increases (ILO, 2020).

Participants also highlighted reliance on child support grants and limited access to other state benefits.

Mam Nozibele reflected that: *“Ewe,lonto ikhoyo, babe bancinci ngoko . Kwakukho nala mali sasi yifumana,sasiba grantela abantwana. Nayo ayoneli. Eza R350 zazi ngenzi kwanto”*. Yes, there was child support because the children were still young at the time. We received grants for them, but even those were not enough. The R350 grant made very little difference.

Mam’Sizwe: *“uwhoa.....ndandina matyala, asekhona phof nangoku. Ndicutha pha, phinde ndiyo chutha pha. Okokuba aphele. Ndine nhloni, akumnandanga ungakwazi ujonga abantu kuba ubatyala”*. She clapped her hands, sighed and said, uwhoa, I have debts, I still have debts. I pay a little here, then go pay a little there. So that they decrease. I am ashamed, it is not nice to not be able to look at people, because you owe them.

The R350 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant was widely described as insufficient to cover basic living expenses such as rent and food. Empirical studies conducted during and after the COVID-19 lockdown indicate that although the SRD grant provided short-term relief, its monetary value was inadequate for households dependent on informal income streams (Casale & Shepherd, 2021; Rogan & Skinner, 2020). Further evidence suggests that informal workers experienced prolonged livelihood instability even after restrictions eased, indicating an uneven and incomplete economic recovery (Rogan & Skinner, 2022). These findings underscore that the pandemic functioned not merely as a temporary interruption but as a critical turning point that deepened structural precarity and reshaped long-term financial trajectories within the informal economy.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the study’s findings from interviews with 11 female street vendors operating around Mthatha Plaza in the OR Tambo District. The findings were organised thematically to reflect participants’ experiences during lockdown, their emotional responses and coping strategies, their views on support needs, and the lasting financial consequences of the pandemic. Through thematic analysis, key themes emerged relating to financial hardship, emotional distress, and coping strategies. These findings align with evidence that COVID-19 disproportionately affected informal workers, resulting in income loss, food insecurity, and increased psychological strain (Casale & Shepherd, 2021; Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

Participants described lockdown as a period marked by livelihood disruption, reduced customer traffic, and heightened uncertainty, yet many continued trading through adaptive, sometimes covert strategies driven by hunger and caregiving responsibilities. Coping was largely relational and responsibility-based, with support from fellow vendors and family members central to reducing distress. Participants also expressed a strong need for institutional support, emphasising food security, financial relief, inclusion in health education, and access to psychosocial support services. The chapter also highlighted differences across participants, including contrasting mental health presentations ranging from withdrawal and cynicism to hope and motivation. These findings collectively demonstrate that women's participation in the informal economy during crises is shaped by gendered responsibility, structural vulnerability, and limited institutional protection.

The emotional responses observed are also consistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which posits that distress arises when environmental demands exceed coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while the pandemic intensified pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities shaped by gendered inequality (Federici, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2017), it also revealed the resilience and adaptive capacity of female street vendors. However, as noted in informal sector scholarship, such resilience reflects survival within constrained structural conditions rather than adequate institutional support (Bonnet et al., 2019).

The next chapter (Chapter 5) builds on these findings by presenting conclusions, implications for psychosocial support, and recommendations for policy and practice to strengthen the well-being and livelihoods of female street vendors during future crises.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings collectively demonstrate that COVID-19 functioned not only as a public health crisis, but also as a gendered economic and psychosocial crisis for female street vendors. Across themes, participants' experiences reflected the intersection of livelihood precarity, caregiving responsibilities, emotional strain, and limited institutional support. The study contributes to informal economy scholarship by demonstrating how female street vendors navigated crisis conditions through adaptive yet constrained coping strategies shaped by structural inequality.

5.2 SUMMARY ON LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 highlighted that female street vendors are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks due to insecure income streams, caregiving responsibilities and limited institutional protection. Existing studies further demonstrated that COVID-19 intensified pre-existing inequalities within the informal economy. The findings of the present study support these observations while providing contextually grounded insights into the experiences of female street vendors in Mthatha during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

5.3 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section presents conclusions aligned with the main research question and sub-questions outlined in Chapter 1. The conclusions are drawn from the empirical findings and interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework that informed this study. In particular, the findings are considered in light of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which explains how individuals appraise and respond to stressful circumstances within constrained environments (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Each research question is addressed directly below.

The findings that female street vendors experienced severe livelihood disruption during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Participants described reduced customer movement, restricted mobility, financial instability and increased caregiving pressure. Emotional responses included fear, stress, uncertainty, frustration and emotional exhaustion.

Despite these challenges, participants adopted a range of coping mechanisms, including changing trading strategies, relying on social support networks, borrowing money, and drawing motivation from caregiving responsibilities. Coping was therefore shaped both by emotional resilience and economic necessity.

Participants also expressed a strong need for material, informational and psychosocial support. Many felt excluded from relief efforts and believed that institutional responses failed to adequately recognize the realities of informal workers.

The findings revealed that participants experienced severe financial instability during lockdown restrictions. This aligns with Rogen and Skinner's(2020) argument that informal workers experienced abrupt income disruption during COVID-19 restrictions. From a Marxist feminist perspective, these experiences reflect the structural precarity associated with gendered informal labour.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the pandemic intensified existing structural inequalities within the informal economy. Although participants demonstrated resilience and adaptatively, their coping strategies reflected survival within constrained socio-economic conditions rather than genuine economic security.

5.3.1 RQ1: What coping mechanisms did female street vendors use during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?

The findings indicate that female street vendors employed a range of adaptive coping strategies to navigate the economic and social disruptions caused by the lockdown. These strategies included borrowing money, relying on informal savings schemes, negotiating with suppliers, reducing stock levels, altering trading practices, and drawing on support from family and peers. These responses reflect both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping processes, whereby individuals attempt either to modify stressful circumstances or regulate emotional responses to those circumstances (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Emotional coping mechanisms were also evident. Many participants relied on faith, mutual encouragement within their trading communities, and maintaining hope during periods of uncertainty. However, these coping strategies largely functioned as survival mechanisms within structurally constrained environments marked by poverty,

regulatory insecurity and limited institutional protection. This aligns with South African research indicating that coping among informal workers during the pandemic was shaped by necessity rather than structural empowerment (Rogan & Skinner, 2020).

5.3.2 RQ2: What challenges were experienced by female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during the lockdown restrictions?

Participants experienced severe financial instability due to restricted mobility, reduced customer access, and enforcement practices that threatened their trading spaces. As informal traders are dependent on daily earnings, the abrupt interruption of trading activities directly affected their ability to meet household needs. Similar findings have been reported nationally, where informal workers were found to be disproportionately affected by lockdown restrictions (Casale & Shepherd, 2021).

Emotional and psychological challenges were equally significant. Participants described heightened anxiety, fear and uncertainty associated with income loss and unpredictable regulations. The psychological impact of financial insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic has been widely documented, including links to anxiety and depressive symptoms (Cortés-Alvarez et al., 2020). The pandemic therefore amplified pre-existing structural vulnerabilities within the informal sector rather than creating entirely new conditions of hardship.

5.3.3 RQ3: What psychosocial support did female street vendors require from professionals when in distress?

Female street vendors require accessible, culturally sensitive, and contextually grounded psychosocial support services. Although informal social networks provided emotional encouragement, these networks were limited in their capacity to offer sustained assistance during prolonged economic uncertainty.

There is a need for community-based psychosocial interventions that address stress management, trauma associated with livelihood insecurity, and the emotional burden of caregiving responsibilities. Community-oriented and task-sharing mental health approaches have been recommended as viable strategies in low-resource contexts where formal psychological services remain inaccessible (Patel et al., 2011). Effective psychosocial support must therefore integrate economic realities with emotional well-being, rather than treating psychological distress in isolation from structural conditions.

5.3.4 RQ4: What conclusions could be drawn from the coping strategies utilised by female street vendors?

The coping strategies utilised by participants demonstrate both agency and constraint. While women displayed adaptability, resourcefulness, and perseverance, these strategies emerged from necessity rather than empowerment. Informal economy scholarship emphasizes that resilience among informal traders often reflects adaptation within structurally unequal systems where limited formal protection exists (Chen, 2012).

Sustainable livelihood security cannot rely solely on individual coping capacities. Structural recognition of informal traders, inclusive regulatory frameworks, and coordinated institutional support are required to ensure long-term stability and dignity. Without such reforms, coping remains reactive rather than transformative (Valodia & Francis, 2020).

5.3.5 RQ5: What recommendations could be made for psychosocial interventions to empower and support female street vendors?

The study recommends that psychosocial interventions be community-oriented, gender-sensitive, and economically informed. Support strategies should include group-based emotional initiatives within trading communities, financial stress management education, and collaboration between municipalities, non-governmental organizations, and psychosocial professionals.

Interventions should recognize female street vendors as active economic agents navigating constrained environments rather than framing them solely as vulnerable subjects. Strengths-based approaches that avoid deficit narratives align with contemporary informal economy scholarship that cautions against pathologizing poverty (Bonnet et al., 2019). Psychosocial initiatives should therefore operate alongside advocacy for inclusive policies that formally recognize informal traders.

5.3.6 Main Research Question: What were the experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions?

Overall, the lived experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions reflect the intersection of economic vulnerability, gendered responsibility, and institutional marginalization. Participants experienced immediate income loss, emotional distress, regulatory insecurity, and intensified caregiving burdens. In line

with transactional stress theory, participants' responses to the pandemic were shaped by their appraisal of threats and the coping resources available to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, these coping resources were constrained by informal employment conditions characterized by limited labor protection and insufficient social security measures (Chen, 2012). The pandemic therefore intensified structural inequalities embedded within the informal sector. Although participants demonstrated resilience and agency in navigating crisis conditions, their experiences were shaped by limited social protection and inadequate institutional recognition. The study concludes that meaningful responses to future crises must incorporate both psychosocial support and structural reform to promote sustainable livelihood security and dignity.

The study therefore concludes that psychosocial well-being within the informal economy cannot be separated from structural livelihood security, gendered labor realities and meaningful institutional inclusion.

5.4 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on informal work, gendered labour, and crises vulnerability in South Africa by foregrounding the lived experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in Mthatha. While existing research has examined the economic effects of the pandemic on informal workers, this study contributes a qualitative understanding of how female street traders navigated emotional distress, caregiving responsibilities, livelihood disruption, and institutional exclusion within a secondary-city context.

The study further contributes by demonstrating that women's coping strategies during the pandemic were shaped not only by individual resilience, but also by structural inequality and survival-based necessity. By integrating feminist perspectives with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, the study highlights the relationship between emotional well-being, economic security, and gendered caregiving responsibilities within the informal economy.

Practically, the findings contribute to discussions on inclusive policymaking, psychosocial support, and crises-response planning for informal workers. The study therefore provides contextually grounded insights that may assist municipalities,

community organizations and policymakers in designing more responsive support mechanisms for women operating within the informal sector.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Research is relevant when it contributes to improving social conditions and informing policy and practice. The recommendations below are drawn directly from the findings of the qualitative interviews and aim to strengthen structural recognition and support for female street vendors.

5.5.1 Policy Recommendations

Local government should formally recognise street vending as a legitimate livelihood and protect traders from arbitrary harassment by creating secure, clearly managed trading spaces. Where regulation is required, it should be predictable, transparent and implemented with trader participation.

During crises such as pandemics, municipalities should develop emergency measures tailored to informal traders, including clear communication of regulations, safe trading arrangements and rapid relief mechanisms to reduce severe income loss.

5.5.2 Practice-Based Recommendations

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and community structures should support women traders through combined programmes that offer emergency relief and practical capacity-building. Interventions should be co-designed with women traders, ensuring that programmes respond to lived needs rather than external assumptions.

Professional services, including psychosocial and health outreach, should be integrated with practical support pathways because participants often prioritised food insecurity and survival needs above stand-alone counselling.

5.5.3 Recommendations for Participatory Decision-Making

Women street vendors should be included in consultations and decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods, particularly in crisis planning and the regulation of trading spaces. Participatory structures, such as liaison committees between municipalities, trader associations and stakeholder organisations, can improve trust, strengthen communication and ensure that policies reflect lived realities.

However, structural recognition and regulatory interventions should be developed collaboratively with street vendors themselves to avoid unintended consequences

such as restrictive permit systems, compulsory membership fees, and regulatory requirements that may further marginalize vulnerable women traders. Participatory approaches are therefore essential in ensuring that support mechanisms protect, rather than limit, the economic autonomy and livelihood of street vendors.

5.6 AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research could examine street vendors in urban and metropolitan areas to explore how different regulatory environments and market conditions shape informal livelihoods. Comparative studies could strengthen transferability and deepen engagement with the theoretical framework.

Studies that include male street vendors would allow for a comparative gender analysis of caregiving responsibilities and livelihood strategies. Research involving foreign national street vendors is also recommended to explore citizenship-based inequalities in access to social protection, exposure to regulation and livelihood insecurity.

Longitudinal research is recommended to assess the long-term impacts of the pandemic on livelihoods, debt, household well-being, and coping. Future studies could also explore younger women's pathways into street vending in the context of persistent youth unemployment, as well as differences in access to state support across age groups.

5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was confined to a small-town context and a specific trading area, which limits transferability to larger urban contexts where market conditions and enforcement practices may differ. The sample focused exclusively on female street vendors, limiting comparative gender analysis. Foreign national street vendors were excluded and younger women were underrepresented, which restricts insight into how citizenship status and life-course stage shape informal trading experiences.

Data collection in a busy taxi-rank environment introduced practical challenges, including noise, interruptions and variable privacy, which may have influenced some responses. Despite these limitations, the study provides rich qualitative insight into the lived experiences of female street vendors and generates practical implications for policy and professional practice in crisis contexts.

A limitation of the study is that data were collected retrospectively several years after the COVID-19 lockdown period. Participants recollections may therefore have been influenced by memory bias or post-pandemic reinterpretation of experiences. However, many participants described emotionally and economically significant events that remained deeply memorable due to the severity of livelihood disruption experienced during the lockdown.

5.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research explored the lived experiences of female street vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in the Eastern Cape Province. Female street vendors' livelihoods are shaped by structural inequality, gendered responsibilities and limited institutional protection. COVID-19 amplified existing vulnerabilities, exposing the fragility of informal livelihoods while also revealing women's adaptive capacity under extreme uncertainty. Meaningful support must move beyond individual resilience and address structural conditions that produce vulnerability. Recognising street vendors as legitimate economic actors and incorporating their voices into policy and crisis planning processes are essential steps toward promoting dignity, economic security and social justice. Future crises responses must therefore move beyond temporary relief measures toward long terms, inclusive approaches that recognise informal workers as essential economic actors deserving of protection, dignity and meaningful social support.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



College of Human Sciences_CREC

Date: 17/12/2024

Dear: Miss Luntukazi Gazi

NHREC Registration # : (Rec-240816-052)

Ref #: 4801

Name: Miss Luntukazi Gazi

Student #: 10332278

Decision: Ethics Approval from 17 December 2024 to 16 December 2025

Researcher: Miss Luntukazi Gazi

Mthatha Bongweni

Mthatha

10332278@mylife.unisa.ac.za 0661603378

Supervisor: Dr Cily Tabane Tabanem@unisa.ac.za

The Lived Experiences of Female Street Vendors During Covid-19 Restrictions in the Eastern Cape Province

Qualification: MA Psychology

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Human Sciences_CREC for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The **medium-risk application** was **reviewed** by the College of Human Sciences_CREC on **17 December 2024** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. 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 College of Human Sciences_CREC.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. 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.

5. 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.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**16 December 2025**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.

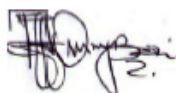
Note

The reference number 4801 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof Khatija Khan
Chair of College of Human Sciences_CREC
E-mail: khankb@unisa.ac.za



Professor Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of College of Human Sciences_CREC
E-mail: onyanob@unisa.ac.za

Appendix B: Permission to Conduct Research



GOLDEN EGG TAXI RANK 2024

Nelson mandela drive 5099

Chairman MR C. MAYIYANE

Cell no: 076 431 6363

Transport MR A. MAZIMBA cell 079 756 229

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

THIS SERVES TO CONFIRM THAT LUNTUKAZI GAZI WITH THE STUDENT NUMBER OF 10332278 HAS INFORMED US ABOUT HER STUDY, THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE STREET VENDORS DURING COVID -19 RESTRICTION IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

WE THEREFORE PERMIT HER TO CONDUCT HER STUDY AT GOLDEN EGG TAXI RANK

FOR FURTHER ENQUIRES PLEASE CONTACT

MR Y. NKENKANA (073 300 3984)



Appendix C: Social Worker Agreement

Dear Sir/ Madam

This letter serves as an agreement between myself, Nomafaku Blossom Sigcau and Luntukazi Gazi who is a student at Unisa with student number, 10332278.

The agreement is that, I will provide free debriefing sessions to Ms Gazi's participants in her research: The lived experiences and the coping mechanisms of female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during COVID 19 restrictions.

Contact details: Nomafaku Blossom Sigcau

Council Reg. No: 10 - 19001

Physical Address: Bongweni loc.

Mthatha

Contact Number: 0798900751

Email Address: nomafakusigcau@yahoo.com or
fafasigcau@gmail.com

Kind regards.

N. B. Sigcau

SAPS: EHW

Mthatha

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



Dear Prospective Participant

TITLE OF STUDY: The coping mechanisms of female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province during Covid-19 restrictions

The Researcher

I am Luntukazi Gazi, and I am doing research with Dr C. Tabane. She is my supervisor and a lecturer at the University of South Africa. I am currently completing my Masters (Psychology) in the School of Social Science and Humanities at the University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, South Africa. We are extending an invite to participate in a study entitled Coping mechanisms of female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province, during Covid-19 restrictions.

What is the purpose of this research?

The goal of the study is to develop an understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic restriction has impacted the lives of female street vendors, and what are some of the coping mechanisms that they employed to cope during the pandemic restrictions. In addition, the study aims to gain a better understanding of how female street vendors can be supported emotionally, psychologically, as well as in terms of dealing with social issues in future.

Why am I being invited to participate?

The study will include black females who are above the age of 18. The study will include approximately 10 individuals, who live in the OR Tambo District in the town of Mthatha, who were and are still street vendors during and after the pandemic. You were chosen to participate in the study as you might be able to provide insight on how you were able to cope during the Covid pandemic restriction period. The researcher will directly approach potential participants at the Mthatha Plaza in Mthatha and inquire whether they are willing to participate in the study. If the potential participants agree

to be part of the study, then the researcher and participant will exchange contact details.

What is the nature of my participation in this study?

The study involves face-to-face semi-structured interviews that will be recorded via an audio tape. The expected duration for the interview session is 90 minutes long. There will be follow up sessions to clarify whether the information documented is correct, those follow-up sessions may take up some of the questions that will be asked during the interview. These are some of the questions to expect during the interviews:

- What are the experiences of female street vendors during the Covid-19 lock down restrictions?
- What coping mechanisms did the female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province utilize during the Covid lockdown restrictions?
- What kind of support do Female Street Vendors need from professionals offering psychosocial support when they are in distress?

Can I withdraw from this study even after having agreed to participate?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What are the potential benefits of taking part in this study?

Participating in the study will help us develop an understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic restriction has impacted the lives of female street vendors so that a better understanding of how female street vendors can be supported emotionally, psychologically and socially is gained. This research will also help people like social workers, counsellors and psychologist gain a better understanding of how they can assist street vendors.

Are there any negative consequences for me if I participate in the research project?

Some questions may evoke certain negative experiences and emotions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, and potentially affect your emotional well-being. Should you need

counselling, you will be referred to a social worker, Miss Nomafaku Sigcau. You will not pay for these sessions. Please see Addendum D

Will the information I convey to the researcher and my identity be kept confidential?

You have a right to insist that your name not be included in the recording, or we can use numbers; like participant 1, during the audio recordings. Also, during report writing your name will not be mentioned. Instead, a pseudo-name will be used to protect your identity.

How will the researcher protect the security of data?

The transcribed data from the interviews will be kept safe by being stored in a locked storage.

Will I receive payment or any incentives for participating in this study?

There will be no compensation should you decide to be part of the study, financially or otherwise.

How will I be informed of the findings/results of research?

Once the research data has been analysed, a follow-up interview will be scheduled to check with participant whether or not the findings are accurate from what the participant narrated.

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

Should you have any concerns or have further questions about the research, contact:

Name: Luntukazi Gazi

Email: luntugazi@gmail.com

Appendix E: 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 F: Interview Guide



SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

Name.....

Age

Gender.....

Race.....

Telephone/Cell.....

Family composition.....

Individuals they support.....

Initiation time in street-vending.....

What items do you sell.....

SECTION B: TOPICAL QUESTIONS

- What are the experiences of female street vendors during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions?
How did this experience make you feel?
- What coping mechanisms did the female street vendors in the Eastern Cape Province utilize during the Covid lockdown restrictions?
Do you feel like this/these coping mechanism/s was effective?
- What kind of support do Female Street Vendors need from professionals offering psychosocial support when they are in distress?
What more do you think professionals can do to help?
- How did you experience this interview?

Appendix G: Interview Transcript

Nozibele/ Thembu (Pseudonym)

2025/08/31

Mthatha Plaza

The interview with this participant was particularly insightful. At the outset, she expressed hesitation about participating in the study, which stemmed from previous negative experiences with individuals who had sought to interview her under the pretext of documenting her biographical information. She explained that she had previously been scammed by a woman who claimed to want to assist her, an experience that contributed to her initial mistrust and reluctance to engage in the research process.

N/B. The session is available on tape-recorder.

Researcher	Here we are sitting with Mama Nozibele, which is not her real name. It is a pseudonym. So can I please hear from you mama, the day Tat' Ramaphosa says lets shutdown everything. Where are you, who are you with, what are you doing?
Mam' Nozibele	On that 21 st , I was sitting at home with my family, because they said on the 21 st no one must be outside.
Researcher	You were at home mama and stopped working?
Mama Nozibele	Yes, but during those weeks we went to work, at times the police ran after us.
Researcher	Where you working from this stand(<i>stall</i>) here mama
Mam Nozibele	We were at the gate there (<i>directing the researcher to the entrance gate of the taxi rank plaza</i>)
Researcher	Okay, so you were sneaking in to come work. And how was business mama?
Mam'Nozibele	It was not good.
	<i>Interrupted by someone asking for information from the participant</i>
Researcher	So police were running after you, and business was slow.
Mam'Nozibele	Yes, business was not going well.
Researcher	So how did you live?
Mam'Nozibele	Yhey, it was hard.

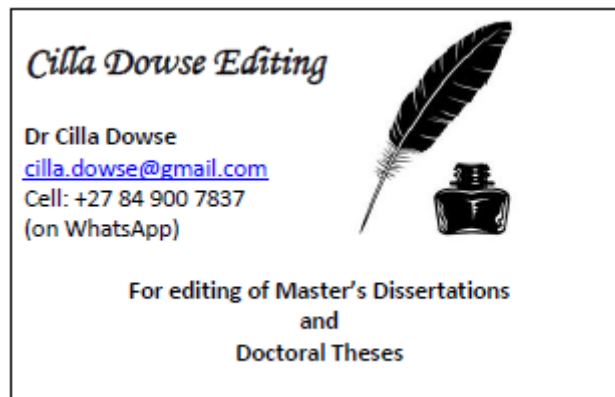
	It was hard! It was not easy. The time for people to come to town was limited. Though we never lacked money to go home.
Researcher	O' okay Mama.
Researcher	So were other things able to be paid for accounts, funeral policies. How did you pay for such as you said you couldn't get money from people, as there were no people.
Mam'Nozibele	We didn't pay!
Researcher	Mhhhhh ... <i>(nodding to show that the researcher is listening to mama's story)</i>
Researcher	The shops understood?
Mam'Nozibele	They didn't understand, they didn't understand but ... <i>(inaudible comment)</i>
Researcher	Okay,so you're with your children at home, living of what there?
Mam'Nozibele	Yes, what is available. They were still under age then because they were small. Theres also that money we were given, us who were granting for the children <i>(supposing foster grant)</i> . But it too was not enough. The R350 could not do anything.
Researcher	Okay, so you could survive of that?
Mam;Nozibele	Mhhhhh ... <i>(nods-indicating yes)</i>
Researcher	During those times, what upheld you, what could you say you held onto to try and cope during that time, or to survive that time?
Mam'Nozibele	There was nothing I was holding onto.
Researcher	So you did not talk to anyone ... neighbour? Where did you get support?
Mam'Nozibele	We couldn't go to anyone's house at that time, we stayed at home, and leave when you come to town.
Researcher	So, you stayed at home, scared and shaking?
Mam'Nozibele	Mhhhhh <i>(indicating yes)</i>
Researcher	So, when you snuck in to come to town, weren't you scared of contracting Covid.
Mam'Nozibele	Mhh.. God shielded us, all of us who come on the sly. The situation was demanding us to do things on the sly <i>(word she used is ukwebisa-sly)</i>

Researcher	So now the restrictions were lifted, they said you can come legally. How is the business going now.
Mam'Nozibele	Business was not right. Many people were still scared to come to town. So, it was not easy. It was the same as when there were still restrictions.
Researcher	Mhhh.. <i>(nodding)</i>
Mam'Nozibele	It was not easy; people were scared to enter and be amongst people.
Researcher	Okay mama.
Researcher	And the stock you sold mama, they weren't buying. What did you do with it?
Mam Nozibele	It went bad. When you bunched your stock, you had to decrease the scale.
Researcher	Oh, so you decreased your scale and ratios because they went bad.
Researcher	Mmhhh <i>(indicating yes)</i> .so things like apples mama?
Ma'Nozibele	Yes, they went off.
Researcher	So is business better now or the same as the years go by?
Mam'Nozibele	No, business never went back to normal as before covid. There are times when its really bad?
Resaercher	Is it better now?
Mam'Nozibele	It is better on the dates for social grants.
Researcher	But do you manage to not go to bed hungry (despite business not going well)
Mam'Nozibele	Yes, we never go to bed hungry.
Researcher	Is there anyone who helped you during this time, neighbours etc.
Mam'Nozibele	No, <i>(pulling a face and grins)</i> , neighbours don't help anymore.
Researcher	So, you can't even go ask for sugar at you neighbours
Mam'Nozibele	No.... <i>(laughing to the question)</i>
Researcher	So can I ask mama, I am with the department of social sciences-Psychologists, Social Works and so on. At that time of the restriction and covid, how could we have helped you?

Mam'Nozibele	Were you working because a lot of people were not working! (<i>sarcastically</i>)
Researcher	Okay. But how could you have wanted us to help, or what area could we have helped- at that time?
Ma'Nozibele	With Food! (<i>she exclaimed with no hesitation</i>)
Researcher	With food ... food was lacking?
Mam'Nozibele	Food was lacking.
Researcher	Do you have any other way of generating income like small scale farming?
Mam' Nozibele	No, as I am always here, I don't have a chance to plough.
Researcher	Okay, so during the covid era, you needed assistance with food. How can we help you now going forward?
Mam'Nozibele	With money and food parcels- <i>mama grins at the mention of money. Laughs at it.</i> Kaloku, business didn't go back to normal. People lost their jobs. Others didn't have money. So, it's still not the same (akuka fani kude kube ngoku)
Researcher	Did you experience any personal loss during the pandemic?
Mam Nozibele	Yes! My uncle from the family.
Researcher	And you buried him in that manner? (<i>1-hour funerals, and they couldn't open the casket</i>)
Mam'Nozibele	Ewe (Yes), it was bad. We couldn't see our loved ones. <i>yayimbi landlela (that manner of burial was heart-breaking)</i>
Researcher	How would you say things are now with you, mama?
Mam'Nozibele	We are visiting here now. (<i>Sibuthile</i> , meaning we are here to just pass time).
Researcher	Okay mama. Siya gqiba ngoku (we are finishing now). Akukho not endiku khube ngayo kule ncoko yethu (is there anything that didn't sit well with you during the interview/chat)?
Mam'Nozibele	No, my child, there isn't, you are not a crook, I also see UNISA documents, so you are not a crook.
Researcher	<i>No problem ke. Enkosi mama ngovuma uncokolo nam</i> (Thank you mama for agreeing to talk to me)

Researcher	I will call you ke to let you know of the results of the study. Enkosi mama.
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Appendix H: Proof of Editing



This letter serves to confirm that editing and proofreading were done for:

LUNTUKAZI GAZI

Master In Psychology

Department Of Psychology

College Of Human Science

University Of South Africa

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE STREET VENDORS DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cilla Dowse', is positioned above the printed name.

Cilla Dowse
01 March 2026

Cilla Dowse PhD in Assessment and Quality Assurance in Education and Training: University of Pretoria 2014 Basic Editing and Proofreading: McGillivray Linnegar Associates 2008 Programme on Editing Principles and Practices: University of Pretoria 2009 Editing and Proofreading for Academic Purposes: McGillivray Linnegar Associates 2021 Professional Editors' Guild Associate Member, DOW003

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