RISK FACTORS FOR BECOMING A BLESSEE IN THE BLESSER CULTURE

by

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Abstract

The research problem was that little is known about the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture in informal settlements. The purpose of this study was to explore the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture within the context of informal settlements in South Africa. The study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm following a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory informed the development of the interview schedule. The data, obtained from 12 participants that were purposively sampled, was analysed following an inductive approach, namely hermeneutic analysis. The risk factors identified in this study was the need for money, the home-situation, peer pressure, and awareness of the blesser culture. The contributions of the study include an in-depth understanding of risk factors in informal settlements for involvement in the blesser culture as a blessee. The limitation of the study to be in Mamelodi Township only may be restrictive since doing so may be limiting to the dynamics of blesser-blessee culture which exist in different regions.

Key Terms

blesser; blessee; blesser culture; risk factors; interpretivist paradigm; hermeneutic analysis; Mamelodi; informal settlement; Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory; purposive sampling

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore, in depth, the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture within the context of informal settlements in South Africa. This focus is important because little is known about these risk factors, which is problematic because community leaders, policy makers and parliamentarians might not have sufficient information to implement strategies and policies preventing the occurrence of the blesser culture in informal settlements. Informal settlements are of specific concern in the current study because teenagers and youth are targeted by blessers for sexual favours in an exchange for money, education fees and a good lifestyle, since they are viewed as poor members of the community where sexual exploitation can easily be executed.

My observation is that the Mamelodi Township community in the Tshwane District Municipality faces many challenges. This is especially true for the informal settlement in Mamelodi. Many of the challenges I have observed, relate specifically to adolescents. The most prevalent challenges faced daily include the abuse of drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, Nyaupe, Wunga and other hallucinogenic drugs; teenage pregnancies and rape in the form of intergenerational transactional sex. Most of these challenges are not faced by one gender only but by both male and female adolescents.

One specific challenge that caught my attention is transactional sex that forms part of the blesser culture. In the informal settlement of Mamelodi, young people seem to involve themselves in the blesser culture for several reasons – including monetary reasons and the need to overcome poverty for themselves and their families; better opportunities for education, jobs and business ventures; better access to health care; peer pressure, and for pleasure. I have seen blessers provide blessees with money, and flamboyant lifestyles that include expensive gifts, overseas trips, and jewellery. In addition, blessers offer young people and their families an opportunity to maintain and educate their siblings, to access nutritious food, to access quality healthcare, and to pay their municipal bills.

However, I have observed that blessers have a downside in that they carry sexually transmitted infections (STIs), contribute to unwanted pregnancies, and youth dropping out of

school. Therefore, though blessers are distributing gifts, the ‘gift’ can cause untold misery to the recipients. Therefore, while the blessers might be viewed as ‘solutions’ to socio-economic, educational, and social challenges – in reality it appears they are sexually exploiting young people.

The introduction reflects my own observations of a problem in my community. The literature examines how the issue is reflected in other sources, and to ascertain if research within this context is justified.

Background of the Problem

Blessers, Blessees and the Blesser Culture

The term *blesser* is derived from the word ‘bless’ which is a Christian colloquialism for the divine favour provided by God to humanity (Ditshego, 2016, as cited in Thobejane et al., 2017). Thus, human beings are the recipients of the gifts from God to fulfil their physiological, spiritual, and psychological needs (Bene, 2011; Gathogo, 2003; Morris, 2012). Furthermore, blesser in a Christian culture implies that an omnipotent being is distributing prosperity to human beings that gratifies body, soul and spirit (Bene, 2011; Gathogo, 2003; Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019; Morris, 2012). Therefore, the transactional sex community adopts this concept to describe married, rich, old men who have sexual relationships with young girls in exchange for flamboyant lifestyles (Estes & Weiner, 2002).

There are many definitions for this occurrence, known as the blesser culture. Mampane (2018) has defined the blesser culture as “a form of transactional sex in which older rich men (“blessers”) tend to entice young women (“blessees”) with money and expensive gifts in exchange for sexual favours” (p. 1). Yet, the occurrence of a blesser relationship between rich women and young men has also been observed (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019). Therefore, definitions of blessers differ. Some authors, such as Estes and Weiner (2002) say the blessers are rich old men (as indicated in the previous examples) whereas some authors, such as Moodley and Ebrahim (2019) suggest that young rich men are also involved in this culture.”

Moodley and Ebrahim (2019) cite the example of a blesser as a young man who gives continuous support to his blessees, and the support is given in a form of finances, gifts, trips and vouchers to get sexual favours and attention. Although ‘sugar mummies’ are often mentioned as an afterthought in numerous academic studies, the relationship between older women and younger men is not fully explored and discussed (Montana, 2020). As a result, similar attributes as male blessers are also found in women blessers, in which case, according to Thobejane et al. (2017), a sugar mummy may be defined as an “older women engaging in sexual intercourse with young boys in exchange for gifts and money” (p. 31). Thus, having cited the definitions of a various authors, one can say that a blesser is a rich man or woman of any age who provides financial support to a person with whom the blesser is having an intimate sexual relationship. The blesser culture essentially relates to the socio-economic status of both the blesser and the blessee. Sugawara and Nikaido (2014) describe a *blesser* as a middle-class man or independent rich man who has the ability to financially sustain and support young girls with whom they are sexually intimate. The middle-class man must be working, self-employed with enough money to spend financially supporting a young girl in exchange for sexual favours.

The blessee, male or female, is referred to as a beneficiary of expensive gifts, money and overseas trips given by a blesser in exchange for sexual favours. Although the terms ‘blesser-blessee’ are derived from the religious term, ‘bless’, they are applied to a ‘sex-for-favours’ culture to highlight a social problem, a socio-economic problem and a religious problem (Thobejane et al., 2017). Blessees do not self-identify as sex-workers, or as prostitutes, but often as girlfriends or ‘friends with benefits’ or even blessees (Taylor, Jinabhai, Dlamini, et al., 2014). In most cases, the blesser will lavish the young girls they are involved in extramarital affairs with, with expensive presents, such as expensive clothes, cars, and trips (Kennedy-Clark et al., 2014).

The blesser culture, therefore, involves transactional sex in which blessers exchange money and goods in the form of gifts to blessees in exchange for sexual stimulation and gratification (Jewkes et al., 2012). Amo-Adjei et al. (2014) agree that blesser-blessee

relationships occur within a context in which presents, favours, services and/or financial support are given in exchange for sexual encounters. This form of transactional sex goes along with some level of agreement and consent from the blessees (UNAIDS & STRIVE, 2018).

Consequences of the Blesser Culture

The blesser culture is perceived as having the potential to bring families out of poverty (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Yet, this culture is problematic since it is an exploitation of teenagers and youth, which brings along several unwanted consequences. The consequences that the blessees experience include *physical consequences*, where bodily harm occurs, which may eventually lead to death, *health consequences*, where youth contract STIs and unwanted pregnancies that may lead to dropping out of school (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2019), and *emotional consequences*, where stress, depression, and anxiety occurs. These consequences will now be discussed in more detail.

Physical consequences are the physiological effects that the blessees endured as a result of participating in the blesser culture may be referred to as the physical consequences. These physical injuries can include, but are not limited to, beatings, slapping, kicking, stabbings, and hair pulling. Thus, there are blessees who live in abusive relationships with their blessers – because it would mean sacrificing the ostentatious lifestyles they have grown accustomed to, many blessees are unwilling to part from their blessers. Certain blessers, particularly those who are men, unashamedly admit in public to cheat and beat their blessees and then use costly presents as a way of comforting. This is the sad reality that the blessees are living in (Thobejane et al., 2017).

Health consequences are the negative health consequences are one drawback of becoming involved in the blesser culture. The primary dangers associated with being in a blesser-blessee relationship are STDs and the possibility of unplanned pregnancies, which could endanger the blessee's physical well-being. Therefore, youth engage themselves in unprotected sexual activities with their blessers at an early stage of their development. It places the female blessees at risk of becoming pregnant and all blessees of contracting STIs

such as Lyphogranuloma venerum (LGV), syphilis, Human papillomavirus (HPV) and Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (Sugawara & Nikaido, 2014). Tuberculosis (TB), an infectious disease that affects the lungs most often, is an additional health hazard for blessees. in South Africa young people prioritise the benefits of being a blessee – to the detriment of their health (Hedden et al., 2011). Numerous non-governmental organisations, governmental organisations and government departments have been working hard to educate teenagers and young people about STIs, and HIV/AIDS that are potentially deadly – but still young people choose to ignore such warnings (Banwari, 2011; UNAIDS & STRIVE, 2018). Therefore, blessees who have no bargaining leverage with their partners to insist on condom use have a higher risk of unintended pregnancy for female blessees or contracting sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV/AIDS; and despite the availability of informative information and assistance, condom and contraceptive usage is reduced (Chatterji et al., 2012). This view is supported by Moodley and Ebrahim, (2019) who pointed out there is lack of blessee empowerment which is also resulting on them to be exposed to HIV/AIDS.

Emotional consequences refer to both positive and bad emotional outcomes. Positive outcomes include feeling content, glad, experience peace, and laughing, whereas negative outcomes can include, among other things, feeling depressed, agitated, apprehensive, worried, and frustrated. Therefore, emotional consequences in this case refer to the unpleasant feelings that the blessee has as a result of participating in the blesser culture. Moreover, the blessers could be problematic in many cases, such as when a blesser can bless more than one woman and, therefore, can have relationships with multiple women to whom he may easily spread STIs or cause unwanted pregnancies with almost all of them at once. These may exacerbate stress, depression, and other emotional complications. In addition, these blessees strive to gain superiority over each other and, therefore, the blessers tend to see themselves as possessing or owning the blessee and having an entitlement over them (Thobejane et al., 2017).

Research on the Blesser Culture Prior to 2015

During the five years prior to 2015, the purpose of research related to the blesser culture revolved around prostitution and give a brief overview of blesser culture as both prostitution and the blesser culture involve the exchange of money for sexual favours (for example, massages, sexual intercourse, sexual enticement, stripping-off of clothes). Prior research also put more emphasis on the challenge of teenage pregnancies faced by blessees from disadvantaged families in township areas. Most of these pregnancies are the results of the rich, middle class and wealthier men in those township areas (Taylor et al., 2014; Moyo, 2014; Sugawara & Nikaido, 2014). Driscoll et al. (2015) are of the view that in South Africa teenage pregnancies, sexual transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancies amongst youth are as a result of lack of information about the consequences of unprotected sex, particularly in urban areas. This is supported by Moyo (2014) who states that there is not enough education, campaigns, awareness and television (media) programmes that challenge the stereo-typical fallacies of teenage pregnancies and HIV/AIDS which are as a result of unprotected sex amongst young people and teenagers in South African society. She further argues that there are not enough programmes that contradict the superstitions of society at large regarding the spreading of HIV/AIDS, sex, and preventative measures (Moyo, 2014). Another study focused on gender stereo-typing, where women are viewed as the only beneficiaries of the sugar daddy phenomenon and that the blessee is always a woman and not, as is also the case in many instances, a man – the resultant harm caused by women shaming has far-reaching consequences. There is the ongoing challenge of extreme poverty which the population is experiencing and as such the people who are feeling it the most are the women, the majority of whom are not educated, are jobless and are poor (Driscoll et al., 2015).

Research on the Blesser Culture Since 2015

Since 2015, the purpose of research on the blesser culture revolve around the spread of HIV/AIDS and the prevention thereof. And also since 2015 researchers on the blesser culture focus more on women and girl empowerment, highlighting instances of women having personal power, and not their blessers (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019). Prior

research has shown that the blesser culture and other transactional sexual relationships have been prevalent in rural areas for some time (Mampane, 2018). Moodley and Ebrahim (2019) noted that the behaviour was socially acceptable and that males were being exploited for material demands and pleasure rather than women. The moral concerns that surround the blessees are problematic because they might be confused with the genuine concern about the current challenges such as multiple partners and the deadly virus of HIV/AIDS.

Blessers have not been discussed in much detail and are mentioned in passing when discussing the blesser phenomenon. Female blessers, unlike male blessers, are frequently addressed as an afterthought, creating an impression that blessers are only males and not females. Despite the fact that scholarly literatures have extensively researched the survival and materialistic needs of the blessee, South Africa is widely regarded as the world's most unequal society. As a result, scholarly literatures have not mentioned or considered inequality as a factor in the involvement of the blessee in the blesser culture in South Africa (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2014). They do not mention inequality because South Africa is the most unequal country. Many studies have overlooked the role of the hereditary features of a person (blesser or blessee) in the explanation of the blesser phenomenon. Despite the fact that various scholarly literatures have explored blessees' lack of education and socioeconomic activity, among other things, there has been a lack of understanding with regard to the influence of past injustices, such as discrimination, lack of opportunities, and oppression. There is also research on 'slut shaming' which is the tendency to shame people who are exercising their right to sexual expression by perceiving them as breaking the normal societal sexual rules and regulations (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019). Thus, researchers have focused more on the role of health risks and moral deteriorations, as opposed to the benefits of educating blessees about the blessers culture, blessees financial stability outside blesser culture, and eradication of poverty for the blessees without depending on the blessers such as survival needs (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019).

Known Risk Factors

Factors such as starvation, lack of clothing, lack of decent housing, sickness and disease, lack of medical assistance, parents without employment, and domestic violence (both verbal and physical), push young people into the blesser culture. As a result, they ignore education about blesser culture and sexually transmitted infections. Youth growing up in these circumstances feel compelled to provide for themselves by providing food, clothing, medical assistance, and paying school fees irrespective of the dangerous sexual diseases they may acquire. They get involved in the blesser culture as a means of survival (Zawu, 2022). However, Moodley and Ebrahim (2019) have a different view since they believe that transactional sex has evolved into more than just a means of survival, but also a means of earning material and symbolic commodities. While many blessees are driven by poverty and survival needs, the majority pursue transactional sex relationships for non-survival reasons such as obtaining trendy clothes, trips abroad, flamboyant lifestyles, obtaining house properties, driving new luxury vehicles, and gaining prominence among their peers by having sex with the powerful, influential and wealthy men in their societies (Thobejane et al., 2017; Mampane, 2018; Kuate-Defo, 2004, as cited in Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019).

The death of both parents could also lead adolescent children into becoming engaged in a blesser relationship. It becomes difficult for adolescent children who are heading families, because they have to ensure that they feed their siblings and themselves, and fulfil the basic needs of their siblings and of themselves (Hoss & Blokland, 2018). Young people who are part of ‘child-headed’ families due to being orphaned are living in poor conditions and, as a result, are exposed to the blesser culture and are at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (Mampane, 2018). This is because these young people are not willingly participating in transactional sex and the blesser culture, but rather because they are economically deprived. Teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS affect the majority of children growing up as orphans and those who are growing up in dysfunctional homes (Moyo, 2014). Children who are orphaned and vulnerable and who are growing up in broken households are continuously challenged to become blessees in a blesser culture (Lamptey & Armah, 2008). Therefore, when blessers give orphan children the opportunity to support themselves and

their siblings by providing money and food, orphaned children enter into *forced marriages*, *'Ukuthwala'* (IsiZulu) (Mampane, 2018).

Children separated from parents for whatever reason, may receive little or no supervision. Adolescent children risk becoming involved in the blesser culture to compensate for the love of absent parents (Amo-Adjei et al., 2014; Kennedy-Clark et al., 2014). Despite seeing their parents as caring and loving, youth protect themselves from emotional attachment with them because their parents are often separated from them or work far from them; and despite the fact that these youth do receive gifts from their absent parents, they frequently form an emotional attachment with the blessers as a replacement for love and affection from their parents (Amo-Adjei et al., 2014). Langbein and Weber (2018) are of the opinion that excessive parental absenteeism, living with neither or only one parent, parental drug or alcohol abuse, child disabilities and cognitive impairment, and the frequent sharing of bedrooms between children and adults, are all high risk factors associated with sexual abuse. Many factors, including poverty, labour migration, lack of university education, and cultural practices, have contributed to the higher rate of parental absenteeism from their homes in South Africa, especially among fathers (Langbein & Weber, 2018). As a result, these negative factors give blessers an opportunity to exploit the blessees, on the premise that they are parenting on behalf of the parents who are separated from their children. Thus, youth do commit emotionally with blessers because they perceive them as loving, compassionate people who give gifts as a token of affiliative love and a replacement for warmth, affection, care, nurture, support, acceptance or merely love that a parent can offer (Amo-Adjei et al., 2014; Stoebenau et al., 2016).

Since sex is such a sensitive subject in many families, parents offer little or no information about menstruation or sexual intercourse or other sexual activity to their children, especially their daughters (Driscoll et al., 2015). Parents separated from their children through death, divorce, or parents working away from home are also unable to assist their young daughters in getting to a family planning clinic, because as blessees they are

vulnerable for becoming pregnant and it might be difficult for them to negotiate contraceptive usage with the blessers during the sexual activity (Driscoll et al., 2015; Ngubane, 2010).

Divorce of parents could also encourage blesser-blessee relationships because adolescents may think that they are the cause of their parents' divorce (Kennedy-Clark et al., 2014). As a result, they resort to transactional sex as a way of mitigating their guilt, since they see themselves as bad, incapable and problematic in the family (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018). According to Estes and Weiner (2002) children from broken families are twice as likely than those who live with both parents to have sex before the age of sixteen. This is supported by Moyo (2014) who believes that "children from dysfunctional homes are more likely to have sex before turning sixteen years; and in comparison to teens whose parents were married, children of divorced parents are likely to engage in underage sex" (p. 42).

When there is domestic conflict or violence between parents in a family, children feel that they are not receiving any attention from their parents, or they feel that they are the ones that are causing the conflict; as a result, they seek love, friendship, comfort, interaction, companionship, and stability elsewhere (Estes & Weiner, 2002; Moyo, 2014). Teens often mistakenly believe that they can find love, friendship, comfort, companionship, and stability from their sexual partners by engaging in sexual activities (Moyo, 2014). Even though Estes and Weiner (2002) do not necessarily focus on the blesser culture but rather on the commercial sexual exploitation of children, intergenerational sex, and transactional sex, they agree that a broken family, as a result of separated or divorced parents, affect and contribute to the abnormal sexual behavioural practices of children younger than sixteen. As a result of their perspectives, the current study is able to elucidate the causes of undesirable sexual behavioural patterns among teenagers and youth that are linked to blesser culture and transactional sexual tendencies in the context of a shattered, dysfunctional family, or parental divorce.

The desire to fit in as a result of peer pressure, social media and other mainstream media, or observing the flamboyant lifestyles of their friends and the way in which they make

money in order to maintain these lifestyles – are all factors which entice teenagers and young people to become involved in the blesser culture in an attempt to avoid to be labelled old-fashioned (Thobejane et al., 2017).

The blessee's age and gender are also potential risk factors. Although an age gap between partners is associated with a high level of HIV/AIDS infections in transactional relationships (Jewkes et al., 2012), many young men participate in transactional sex with women who vary in age (Jewkes et al., 2012). This view is supported by Chatterji et al. (2012) who believe that there is a traditional view of transactional relationships in which the male, who is often older and married, is referred to as a blesser, but the female, who is often older and married, is not referred to as a blesser. There are several instances of young women participating in the blesser culture, but no documented instances of older women participating in the blesser culture. Furthermore, there is a stereotype that older men are more likely than young boys to participate in transactional sex (Varjavandi, 2017).

Research Problem

The research problem is that more information is required about the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture in informal settlements in South Africa. Media platforms such as radio, television, YouTube, Google, and the tabloids, present dramatic and alluring forms of advertisements that are not aimed at stopping the rifeness of the blesser culture (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Thobejane et al. (2017) are of the view that at rural universities, the student representative body should organize awareness campaigns such as *Go-away blesser*. This view is supported by Stoebenau et al. (2016), who are of the opinion that teenagers and youth ought to caution their peers through awareness campaigns such as *Stay Away From Blessers*, so that they may prepare themselves for the toxic reality of the blesser phenomenon.

The Department of Social Development, the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, and Non-Profit Organizations might have insufficient information and as such they may not able to intervene or to put programmes in place that are aimed at empowering the blessees and other youth (Moyo, 2014). Parents, principals at schools, and

members of school governing bodies, civic societies, and community policing forums may also lack information, which would inhibit any attempts to reduce the pandemic of the blesser culture.

This problem is not only happening in the informal settlement of Mamelodi Township but it is a worldwide problem. However, young people in the informal settlement of Mamelodi Township do not have a platform to voice their problems and express their anguish; unlike in other communities across the world where platforms such the ‘Me too movement’ (Burke, 2022), ‘Not in my Name’ movement’ (Mahlangu, 2018), ‘Total shut down movement’ (Namugwe, 2018) and ‘The Weinstein effect movement’ (Walton, 2024), are available.

There is a void in the literatures since relatively few literatures are being produced in informal settlements in township regions. Many studies are being undertaken at universities (Thobejane, 2017) and inner cities (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2019). Another discrepancy that I have noticed is that many scholars appear to believe that blessees are primarily women and not men, and that blessers are males rather than females.

The observations I have made in the informal settlement, notably in Mamelodi township, have justified the current study. More so, because I could not locate another study or literature review focussing on the Mamelodi informal settlement. Furthermore, while the dynamics of South African townships and their informal settlements are closely related, Mamelodi township is unique in that there are many informal settlements where the youth are unemployed and the community's economics are controlled by middle-aged men, older men, and women.

Aims and Objectives of the Research

The aim of this study was to identify and explore the risk factors relating to the blesser culture – specifically with reference to the youth from the informal settlement in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane District Municipality of South Africa.

During the research, the researcher interviewed the participants from the study’s target group, analysed the data for risk factors and presented the results and recommendations. The objectives of the data collection phase were:

- to determine the influence of the blessers on the blessees' lives
- to understand the difference between the blessees' lives before and after becoming blessees
- to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of being a blessee.

In addition, the general objective of this study was to distribute the findings of this dissertation to influential people – such as businesspersons, political parties, civic members, members of media and traditional leaders in the community – in order to address the widespread of the blesser culture in the informal community of Mamelodi Township.

Research Questions

The main research question which will be answered through this study is: What are the risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in the Republic of South Africa? To answer this question, the following sub-questions will be answered:

- What influence do the blesser(s) have on the blessee's life?
- How was the blessee's life before becoming a blessee?
- How was/is the blessee's life after becoming a blessee?
- What are the advantages of being a blessee?
- What are the disadvantages of being a blessee?

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Perron, 2018; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) served as the theoretical framework for this study. The research questions were formulated and investigated with reference to Bronfenbrenner's theory. This theoretical framework guided the interviews because it informed the development of the interview schedule. Throughout the study, the researcher kept the theoretical framework in mind and used the factors as pointers for probing and clarification.

A detailed discussion of the theoretical framework is presented in Chapter 3.

Research Approach

Research Paradigm

The study was conducted using the interpretivist paradigm based on the assumption that the realities of people's lived experiences in their social environment vary from person to person (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Kennedy-Clark (2012) claims that people's lived experiences and social context are intertwined and subjectively interpreted by the individual. Reconciling these two views, Rehman and Alharthi (2016) say that the interpretivist paradigm views social reality as lived experiences implanted and fixed firmly in people within social settings, which they interpret as their social reality, amongst other things, by 'making-sense' of them. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm allows the social phenomenon to be seen through "the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher" (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 21). Considering the aforementioned, it was significant to conduct the study by investigating the subjective interpretations of the various participants.

Because the study tended to view theory as emerging from data collection rather than as the primary motivation for research, the interpretive technique was employed (Grix, 2004, as cited in Chatterji et al., 2012).

Research Methodology

The research methodology chosen, which aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, is *hermeneutic phenomenology*. This methodology allows for the description and interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants. Furthermore, this methodology enables the researcher to reach an understanding based on the first-hand lived experiences and understanding of participants (Miles et al., 2013). It is also described as an approach that leads to the understanding, interpretation, and description of the substance of lived experiences; recognizes the significance and value of psychological, physical, as well as sociological effects on participants by participants' lived experiences (Gillen, 2019). Understanding and interpreting how a person expresses themselves by talking to other people, communicating through music, reading, listening, and through gestures, may be some of the ways in which one is able to understand the lived experiences of participants (Vieira & de Queiroz, 2017). Interpreting the text, on the other hand, is based on the

changes in the world over time and context. As a result, the art of understanding gaps, discrepancies and misunderstandings is truly the art of hermeneutic phenomenology (Lindseth, 2021). Furthermore, Gillen (2019) points out that this technique is regulated and composed of ethical processes in daily life experiences that are difficult to reach using traditional research methodologies.

Research Design

The proposed study is cross-sectional and has followed a qualitative approach. It was conducted in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality.

Population and sampling. The sample was drawn from a population of youths aged between 18 and 22 years who are blessees from the Mamelodi Township community. Qualitative data was collected from these participants, who are in the young adulthood stage, which is a developmental stage according to Erik Erikson (Cote and Levine, 1987). The focus was on this group of participants because they are not only on an intimacy versus isolation stage, but they are also more accessible to blessers through various platforms including social media (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018). At the same time, they are vulnerable to the blesser culture due to the risk factors they may be experiencing, since they are faced with numerous decisions that can change the trajectory of their lives. As such, they are also considered to be at a transitional point, from the fifth stage of the identity versus role confusion stage (Cote and Levine, 1987).

Some traits that predispose the age group category include the fact that some young individuals throughout this era have significant difficulty building close, meaningful relationships with other people. As a result, many young individuals desire to develop closeness and meaningful relationships with others. Some youths are interested in growing into their identities and roles. As a result, individuals actively explore their values, beliefs, and aspirations in an effort to find a sense of self and personal identity (Cote and Levine, 1987).

Participants were selected and recruited after receiving ethical clearance from the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa to

conduct the research. Twelve participants from Mamelodi Township, between the ages of 18 and 22 years, were selected based on the qualitative research methodological principle of data saturation.

The samples were initially selected using purposive sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling. As a result, the sampling process had straightforward motives and intentions in order to address the research questions. To increase the number of participants, snowball sampling was used, in which participants were asked if they knew someone who fit the criteria for inclusion in the sample. This method was used to increase the sample size when finding prospective participants became difficult.

Inclusion criteria. The researcher aimed to include both males and females between the ages of 18 and 22 years. These participants must have been in relationship with blessers and were, at the time of the research, in a relationship with a blesser, or had been in the blesser culture in the past, and were inhabitants of Mamelodi Township.

Exclusion criteria. The researcher purposefully omitted participants less than 18 years of age as this group would have required consent from parents or legal guardians, which could have been challenging; firstly, the process of acquiring parental or guardian consent, and secondly because attempting to obtain this consent could have resulted in negative consequences for the teenagers, resulting in them being punished by their parents for participating in transactional sex and having blessers.

There were other complicating factors that the researcher considered when omitting potential participants. These factors included blessees who had children with their blessers. This is because this type of relationship between the blessee and the blesser may completely change the type of relationship to a relationship which is no longer a blesser-blessee type of a relationship.

The young people older than 22 years old were also excluded because they were in a different developmental phase. Thus, the time gap between these youths since being teenagers becomes too long.

Research setting. The study was conducted at Tateni Community Care Service (Tateni) in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. This non-governmental organisation (NGO) was selected for access to participants since this organisation works with orphans and vulnerable youth. According to the Tateni Community Care Service' website (Tateni, 2024), vulnerable youth include previously disadvantaged and marginalized young people whose everyday lives are defined by violence, sexual abuse, negligence, substance abuse, domestic violence, crime, psychological disorders, financial abuse, lack of school attendance or illiterate, and lack of positive adult relationships and role-models

A research assistant prepared the apparatuses, such as audio recorder, notebook pad, pens, pencils, and computer, for the interview, cleaned the room where the interviews took place, and ensured that the COVID-19 regulations were followed as prescribed by the policies of the University of South Africa (*CREC_2022_APPLICATION FOR ETHICS R*, n.d.). The research assistant help to identify potential participants after which the researcher contacted them directly to inform them, so that they would not feel compelled to participate merely because they had initially been approached by an employee of the Tateni Community Care Service

Data collection. Data was gathered from the participants over a period of six months. Some participants were selected through snowball sampling since it was difficult to get in touch with specific recipients for an interview. The Republic of South Africa's COVID-19 regulations and restrictions may have made interviewing the participants even more challenging, thus it was imperative to finish the interviews within the six months allocated time, before more COVID-19 restrictions were put in place. Furthermore, because the blessees were not yet ready to share their personal stories, meetings and appointments had to be scheduled and arranged. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to gather the data. This approach helped to gain a detailed picture of the participants' lived experiences and how they have made sense out of it. The semi-structured interviews gave the interviewer flexibility regarding the interview schedule (see Appendix A)

to allow for sufficient probing and information gathering, in terms of the time frame set for the interview. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted face-to-face because this method has considerable value in that it is much more personal and you can observe the body language of the participants; body language such as a smile, a frown, and eye contact, but also other observed, non-verbal communication, such as being angry, upset, annoyed, happy, or excited.

During the interviews, the researcher kept field-notes while also audio-recording the interviews. Immediately after each interview the researcher wrote down his impressions on all aspects of the interview. The researcher did not unnecessarily interrupt the participant and allowed the participant's story to unfold naturally. However, probing was required for the purpose of clarification. The researcher also checked if information was covered related to the research sub-questions of this study. If not, the researcher specifically asked follow-up questions. The data was qualitative in nature and in the form of audio recordings in order to "preserve the events in a fairly authentic manner for subsequent data analysis" (Gall et al., 2003, as cited in Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 21).

Data analysis. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher using an electronic platform, while the data analysis was conducted using MS Excel software.

Concurrent with the interviews, the analysis was conducted in order to ensure that the data collected was well-organized and to facilitate the proper sorting and filing of notes, transcripts, and recordings. The qualitative research of an interpretivist approach known as the *hermeneutic analysis*, established by Lindseth and Norberg (2004, 2021), was employed in this study since it aligns with the methodology. For each transcript, the analysis was done in stages. Reading and re-reading transcripts, taking notes and creating emergent concepts were all part of the analysis. Once the emerging concepts were identified in the data, the researcher looked for words, sentences as well as events, for further analysis. Therefore, the relationship between emergent themes was investigated, and similar themes were combined

to form major themes. The hermeneutic technique is an attempt to clarify and make sense of a research purpose.

Results

As indicated in Section 1.5, the research questions were formed and interrogated with reference to Bronfenbrenner's theory by conducting semi-structured interviews. The intersection between person and the context factor, meaning the relationship between the people, their environment and how they interpret these, making them behave the way they do, were examined to identify the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture. The results are presented in Chapter 5.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because, according to my knowledge, it was the first of its kind conducted in Mamelodi Township.

Furthermore, this information could guide the development of interventions and policies to stop the blesser culture and to lessen the negative effect thereof on those who were involved in such a relationship. The study could provide information that could be used in initiatives to create awareness of the risks of being involved in blesser-blessee relationships.

The study is significant because it could significantly hasten the demise of the blesser culture. This knowledge could be used to break the culture of men, women and children being abused by rich, influential, older people within the community. This might, in turn, give the youth an opportunity to better their lives by using their talents, skills and education.

Trustworthiness

The reliability of the study has been considered in terms of its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017). Face-to-face interviews were conducted to keep the events, and the information provided by participants, genuine and give a true account of the participant's personalities, values, and sense of self. This

process was followed to obtain reliable data (Gall et al., 2003, as cited in Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

Credibility

The study's findings have been verified by the researcher by double checking the information gathered during the interviews. The study's findings have been verified by the supervisor to ensure that the findings and the data collected are corresponding. Through the design of an interview schedule, as well as following a thorough analysis method and having the supervisor examine the results of the analysis, the study has been verified and the results have been deemed credible.

Transferability

The study is transferable since comprehensive descriptions of the study, the setting of the study, and the sample interviewed were provided. As a result, the study's researcher showed that the findings are applicable to various locations, settings and situations, people, and phenomenon (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

Readers would be able to verify the research's dependability by following the researcher's process for ensuring transferability. In addition, if other researchers wish to conduct the same research, they should be able to do so with the information provided in the dissertation (Shenton, 2004). The researcher attained dependability with the support of the supervisor by ensuring that the study methods are rational, traceable, and well-documented. Through the auditing process, the researcher demonstrated the study's trustworthiness and dependability (Nowell et al., 2017). Thus, the readers who examine the study methods will be able to assess the researcher's dependability (Nowell et al., 2017; Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a qualitative researcher's concern that is comparable to objectivity. The researcher, with the help of the supervisor, have taken the necessary precautions to ensure that the conclusions of the study are, as far as possible, the outcome of the participants' experiences, thoughts, ideas, points of view and perspectives, rather than the

researcher's personal preferences. This study's findings reflect the true responses of the participants. Bias and personal motivations on the part of the researcher have been prevented through continuous reflection by the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher, therefore, ensured that the findings were clearly drawn from the data collected. The researcher also showed how conclusions and interpretations were obtained (Shenton, 2004). When the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the data has been established, confirmability is also achieved (Guba & Lincoln 1989, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017).

Ethical considerations

The University of South Africa's Ethical Research Committee approved this study. Additionally, a letter of approval to conduct the research was obtained from Tateni Community Care Service (see Appendix B). Furthermore, data collection was done after obtaining informed consent from the participants (see Appendix C). The study's application of these values, namely beneficence and non-maleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for people's Rights and Dignity (APA, 2017), are detailed below. Finally, the study was guided by the policy on ethical code of conduct of the University of South Africa.

Principle A: Beneficence and Non-maleficence

The study was aimed to protect the participants' well-being and welfare by ensuring that the location where the interviews took place was safe and appropriate for conducting research (APA, 2017). Information gathered during the study was be kept confidential to protect the privacy of research participants. It also ensured that the participants' information was not disclosed to unauthorized individuals. Further details on principle A: beneficence and non-maleficence, are discussed in Chapter 4.

Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility

The study was designed to be trustworthy to participants, with no reward, compensation or personal advantages and benefits to participants (APA, 2017). Details on principle B: fidelity and responsibility are discussed in Chapter 4.

Principle C: Integrity

The study was design to promote accuracy, honesty, sincerity and truthfulness by recording the conversations between the interviewer and the interviewees, to ensure that data collected is evaluated, interpreted, and analysed in a way the participants presented it, and to ensure that the study does not engage in non-malevolent research (APA, 2017). Details on principle C: integrity are discussed in Chapter 4.

Principle D: Justice

The study ensured fair treatment of participants and non-disclosure of their participation by not disclosing their names to the staff members of Tateni and/or disclosing their participation intragroup. During the research procedure, no participant were made to feel unimportant, insignificant, or less than themselves; everything was be done to ensure that all participants were treated fairly and that justice was afforded to all participants (APA, 2017). Details on principle D: justice are discussed in Chapter 4.

Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

Participants' dignity and value have been respected throughout the study, as are their rights to personal privacy, confidentiality of information submitted (see Appendix C), and self-determination. Participants' identities were kept private and not even revealed within the group (APA, 2017). Details on principle E: respect for people's rights and dignity are discussed in Chapter 4.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are listed to assist the reader for the purpose of the current study.

Blessee: A younger person who enjoys benefits provided by a rich older person in exchange for sexual favours (Thobejane et al., 2017).

Blesser: Is an older rich person who offers benefits to a younger companion in exchange for sexual favours (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019).

Blesser culture: It is a phenomenon in which older rich individuals (blessers) who are typically married, give expensive gifts to the younger blessees, who are not married, in exchange for sex (Thobejane et al., 2017).

Community leaders: The people who are taking a role of leading the community

Informal settlement: A settlement that is unauthorised and unapproved by the local government which is the result of land grab by people and due to rapid urbanisation. The settlement most likely consists of shacks.

Intergenerational transactional sex: A sexual relationship that involves people from different generations (Moyo, 2014).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Organisations which are not formed by government but by members of the community to meet the needs of their society but they can seek and get help from the government in order for them to be sustained (Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, 2021).

Sugar-daddy or Sugar-mammy Used interchangeably with blessers, sugar-daddy or sugar-mummy are same concepts used to describe a wealthy person who gives material benefits to someone who is giving him/her sexual favours (Sidloyi et al., 2010 as cited in Chatterji et al., 2012).

Tateni Community Care Service: A non-profit organisation that cares for the orphans and vulnerable children in Mamelodi Township; they have different programmes that are aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty of Mamelodi Township residents (Tateni, 2024).

Township: The community created as a dwelling place by an apartheid regime, to keep black people away from the economic activities in the inner city and to deprive black people from participating in the economy of the country – areas that are especially non-productive and are not arable (Stoebenau et al., 2016).

Traditional leaders: The leaders of the community that are recognised as chiefs, kings and queens by the constitution of the republic of South Africa (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2021).

Transactional sex: Zawu (2022) define transactional sex as “a sexual relationship or act(s), outside of marriage or sex work, structured by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material benefit or status” (p. 2)

Youth: For the purpose of this study, youths are regarded as late adolescents aged 18 to 22 years (National Youth Development Agency, 2021).

Summary

In conclusion, having no or limited knowledge of the blesser culture is problematic, not only to teenagers and youth, but also to legislators and lawmakers, who may be unable to pass laws aimed at halting the phenomenon of the blesser culture in South Africa. This chapter argued for the importance of studying the risk factors involved from getting engaged in the blesser culture. The problem is that, little is known about the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture in informal settlements; and posed the question was that, what is the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture in Mamelodi informal settlement. The chapter further provide an overview of how the study was approached, how ethical considerations were addressed and how the trustworthiness of the study was ensured.

The physical, mental, and physical consequences of the blesser culture, on the other hand, are real. Divorce, children separated from their parents, a desire to fit in, and being an orphan are all the risk factors in the blesser culture.

The researcher maintained the theoretical framework during the interviews and used the factors as points for probing and explanation. The theoretical underpinning for this study is the Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory.

Although there are numerous factors to blesser culture involvement in South Africa, survival and materialistic possession motivate many teenagers and youth to be involved in the blesser culture. Many blessees, on the other hand, become involved in the blesser culture in order to sponsor their education, pay municipal bills, pay medical bills for their parents, and other fundamental needs for themselves and their significant others. Blessers,

on the other hand, pretend to be taking care of and looking after the blessees, while sexually exploiting them.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter the following aspects are covered: the context contributing to the blesser culture; research/literature related to the research problem and subsequent research question and sub-questions; theory related to the research problem; alternative points of view on the blesser culture; and a summary of the chapter.

The focus of this study is the blesser culture. This culture in itself, is not risky behaviour but could include risky behaviour. Therefore, risky behaviour might be a consequence of becoming involved in the blesser culture. In the blesser society, becoming a blessee has its own set of consequences. This is because the blesser culture is viewed as having the ability to solve the psychological, physiological, spiritual, financial, and emotional issues of the blessee – when in reality, it is exacerbating them. Health, physical, and emotional consequences, as mentioned in Chapter 1, are examples of such issues. Thus, in this chapter the focus will be on better understanding the terms ‘risk factors’ and ‘risky behaviour’ by exploring the meaning of risk factors, risky behaviour, the relevance of knowing the risk factors, and a deeper grasp of the term ‘consequences’, by unpacking the meaning in the context of the blesser culture.

Factors Contributing to the Blesser Culture From Different Contexts

Blesser Culture as a Global Pandemic

The blesser-blessee phenomenon first became popularly known as the blesser culture in South Africa around 2010. The blesser-blessee and sugar-daddy/ sugar-mummy phenomena are the same phenomenon with different terminologies that are used interchangeably under different circumstances with both used to describe the same acts and characteristics of intergenerational sex (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018).Thus, blesser culture is an improved or amended version of the terminology sugar-daddy and sugar-mummy culture (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019). As a result, the blesser-blessee phenomenon is portrayed as though it was a new concept, which originated from the sugar-daddy/sugar-mummy phenomenon; it is the same phenomenon with different terminology (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA,

2018). Mampane (2018) points out that since 2016, the blesser culture has enjoyed more attention in South African media. The blesser culture is widespread and occurring worldwide, even though, in some countries it may not be labelled blesser culture. For example, in the United States of America (USA), it is labelled sugar daddy-sugar mommy, and over the years enjoyed much attention internationally.

In 2006 ‘The Me Too Movement’ was created in England where various local and international communities formed a social movement against sexual abuse and sexual harassment for women. This movement encourages people to make allegations of sex crime public on media platforms (Burke, 2022)

‘The Surviving Jeffrey Epstein’ movement, was started in 2007 in the USA after a wealthy, rich and powerful man, Jeffrey Epstein from Palm Beach in Florida, USA, was accused of having sex with young girls in exchange for money. The convicted co-accused, Ghislaine Maxwell, helped Epstein recruit young girls to perform sexual activities such as sex including oral sex, massage, and accompanying him on business trips in exchange for money (Ewe & Burga, 2024; Weiser et al., 2019).

In a general fight against sexual exploitation in the USA, women affected have exposed these offenders on public platforms and in court. Much of this alleged exploitation occurred when they were teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18; the movement, called ‘The secret of playboy’ is a result of these allegations. The women who are referred to as playmates accuse the top executive directors of the Playboy company - who are male, powerful, rich, and famous - of sexually exploiting them in an exchange for featuring them in the magazine. Paige Young accused a famous television star, Bill Cosby, of sexually molesting her while she was working at the playboy company as a bunny playmate by using his status, fame and wealth to lure her into offering him sexual favours. Many other women then also accused Bill Cosby of sexual exploitation and other top executive directors of the Playboy company after Paige Young’s confession, alleging that Bill Cosby sexually exploited them from the Playboy house called Playboy Mansion (Ryder, 2022).

‘The Weinstein effect movement’, which started in the USA in October 2017, is a global trend where the allegations of sexual misconduct by famous, powerful and rich men are disclosed (Walton, 2024).

Locally in South Africa, women called for a total shut down of gender-based violence in the ‘#TotalShutdown’ movement on 1 August 2018 at Pretoria Union Buildings (Namugwe, 2018). In addition, ‘The Gender Based Violence and Anti-Gender-Based-Violence’ campaigns in South Africa marched to the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town on 5 September 2019, to address the exploitation of women and children by powerful rich men in South Africa (SAHO, 2020).

Thus, these movements represent women across the globe who are facing the same challenges of being exploited by rich, powerful men; fighting together with them and helping them through advancing and progressing them in a healthy way.

African Cultures Influencing the Blesser Culture

According to Mensah et al. (2022), some African cultures do not allow women to have the same opportunities than men to get education or work in the formal sector. For many generations, women in these African cultures have been forbidden to work in the formal sector, get educated, and own property or have a source of revenue, while males were allowed because they are considered to be a ‘special’ offspring. Men are permitted to own land, properties, and other financial assets. Male children, as opposed to female children, are encouraged to attend school and seek employment opportunities in the formal sector. Thus, African women's economic marginalisation and structural inequalities have increased poverty, which makes them more vulnerable.

Msuya (2017), in his reflection on African culture that fuels trafficking in women and children, emphasizes common traits that African traditions share, which are not similar with the blesser culture. The difference being that in African communities, there are always positive qualities that benefit all members of the community. Ubuntu (humanness), solidarity, tolerance, respect for elders, caring for the needy, sharing, negotiating, talking, and

mediation are just a few of the beneficial cultural practices practiced by Africans. Some traditional African traditions, however, could be detrimental to some societal groups, including women and children.

According to Rupiah (2021), it is viewed as acceptable for men to have concubines in African culture, for example, the former President of the Republic of South Africa, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, his clan name Msholozi, an African Zulu man from KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, had several ‘wives’ simultaneously. He married Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma (1982–1998); Nompumelelo Ntuli (married. 2008), Thobeka Stacy Mabhija (married. 2010), Gloria Bongekeile Ngema (married. 2012), Sebentile Dlamini, a sister of Eswatini’s King Mswati 3 (married 2002), and many more before them (Rupiah, 2021).

Women in African culture are also expected to submit to their husbands at all times, and it is seen as acceptable or normal behaviour for a woman to be physically assaulted as a means of correcting their wrongdoing and disobedience. On such example is seen with Given Mkhari - MSG Africa executive chairman, Power FM owner and Capricorn FM shareholder - who assaulted his wife, Ipeleng Nonkululeko Mkhari, for failing to submit to him when she disobeyed some of his decision in their home (Ritchie, 2018).

That being said, in African culture, there is a problem with concubines, multiple and concurrent sexual relationships on the one hand, and a problem with masculinity and patriarchy manifesting itself through gender-based violence on the other. Because the blessees are aware that they are concubines and that they are involved in concurrent sexual relationships with married rich men, they have a strong sexual network in place before beginning the relationship. When marriage fails to satisfy, being a concubine and engaging in concurrent sexual relationships is a common practice in African communities (Mensah et al., 2022).

Moreover, masculinity and patriarchy present themselves through gender-based violence, which encompasses sexual exploitation and physical assaults of those who are blessed. In numerous instances, blessers admitted to physically abusing and manhandling their blessees when they misbehave (Thobejane et al., 2017). As a result, according to

Msuya (2017), “culture is socially constructed and does not exist independently of those who construct it” (p. 3).

Blesser Culture Viewed From the Perspective of University Students

Globally blessees at universities expose themselves to risky behaviour such as multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex and transactional sex with blessers (Murudi et al., 2018; Phillip & Amone-P’Olak, 2019). There are various common factors among blessees in university environments (Murudi et al., 2018), where a person’s gender and marital status influence their participation as blessees in the blesser community (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018 ; Hoss & Blokland, 2018). Where some parents were unable to meet their children’s basic needs at colleges and universities, this results in their involvement in the blesser culture. However, Khuzwayo and Taylor (2018) are of the view that

> Parenting style also is a factor towards the children getting involved in a blesser culture, for example, dominant parenting style and controlling behaviour by the parents accompanied by strict disciplinary actions, especially with female children, encouraged children to be involved in a blesser culture. (p. 4)

Blesser Culture From a Cultural Perspective

The Longman Exams Dictionary (2006) defines culture as “the beliefs, way of life, art, and customs that are shared and accepted by people in a particular society” p.xxx). While Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary describes culture as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time” (Cambridge Advance Learner’s Dictionary, 2016), The link between culture and sexual behaviour is a hot topic of discussion (Msuya, 2017). Certain sexual behaviours are influenced by cultural norms but researchers disagree on what these cultural values are, how they support sexual behaviour, and how they can be altered. Although there is a widespread consensus that cultural expectations affect behaviour, there are a variety of hypotheses as to how they do so (Khumalo et al., 2020). Further, there has been a mysticism, curiosity, and cultural stereotype about sex, sexual organs, and sexual

experiences, especially with men fantasising and imagining certain sexual experiences with younger female blessees (Jewkes et al., 2012; Mandisa, 2012; Ranganathan et al., 2017). Moreover, one of the myths and false belief systems is that when an older person who is infected with HIV/AIDS has sexual intercourse with a virgin child or a virgin teenager, the disease will be cured (Jewkes et al., 2012; Mandisa, 2012; Moyo, 2014; Pettifor et al., 2012, as cited in Mampane, 2018; Ranganathan et al., 2017). Furthermore, cultural stereotypes about the sexual organ by male blessers made the traditional doctors, and traditional leaders to form initiation schools such as *Domba* (Tshivenda) and *Dance reed* (IsiZulu and SiSwati), to do virginity testing for young women (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Such cultural practices that are aimed at exploiting and raping young girls make kings and chiefs attend such ceremonies to choose the virgin teen girls to be their next wives (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019). Boys, on the other hand, are taken to the mountains during winter each year for initiation school called *Mula or Murundu* (Tshivenda), or *go bolwa* (Pedi) where they are taught to be good in exercising patriarchy, masculinity, and to exploit young girls for their sexual benefit (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Maakamedi, 2017).

Female blessers, on the other hand, recommend sexual relationships with young boys from initiation schools in exchange for material benefits. Because these young boys are now considered adults who have been introduced to the true ‘reality’ of life in terms of sexual activity, they are capable of satisfying a woman’s sexual needs (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Maakamedi, 2017; Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019). As a result, while all of these cultural rituals seem to have good intentions of preserving young people’s virginity, they are actually setting them up for sexual encounters with blessers – to be experienced after these ceremonies, by giving them ideas, preconceived ideologies, pre-exposure to sexual encounters, and examples of possible sexual encounters after the initiation experiences (Maakamedi, 2017; Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019).

Blesser Culture From a Patriarchal Perspective

Patriarchy and masculinity are two aspects of the blesser culture that have been studied by scholars throughout the historical context of a blessee’s role in the blesser culture

(Denbow & Thebe, 2006). Moodley and Ebrahim (2019) are of the view that “in Africa’s patriarchy blesser culture has arisen, and the sense of transactional sex has shifted from managing survival to securing material” (p. 24). Furthermore, Eaton et al. (2003) are of the view that African cultures, traditions, and customs are more patriarchal, oppressive, and dismissive of women – prioritizing the satisfaction of men’s needs over those of women. Men gain sexual access and influence or control over youth, especially young women, in return for financial benefits; this kind of relationship boosts blessers’ masculinity and self-esteem (Thobejane et al., 2017). This view is supported by McPhail and Campbell (2000, as cited in Eaton et al., 2003), who pointed out that men’s patriarchal tendencies are especially well-crafted in South Africa with an idea that masculinity entails having unprotected sex with multiple partners. Furthermore, sexual performance plays a role in the development of masculinity (Driscoll et al., 2015). Raping a woman, particularly a teen girl, makes male blessers feel more manly, or they do so to improve their masculinity (Ngum, 2012). Thus, patriarchal values pertaining to masculinity have been used to describe transactional sex in a South African context, and as such, men are expected to provide for, and control their female partners, according to these principles (UNAIDS, 2018).

Male supremacy stereotypes motivate men and teen boys to have numerous sexual relationships because it is seen as a strength rather than a weakness in many African countries; however, it is also used as a gauge for comparing intellect, masculinity, and achievement among peers of the same generation. Masculinity is almost associated with the strength or capacity to show sexual competency through having multiple sexual relationships (Kaler, 2004, as cited in Longwe, 2015; Varjavandi, 2017), and teen boys like to brag among peers about their sexual skills and abilities to convince women to fall in love with them (Kaler, 2004, as cited in Longwe, 2015).

Education and Training About the Blesser Culture

There is an availability of training for health care workers in South Africa for informing, through awareness campaigns, youth about the blesser culture. The government introduces short courses in an effort to train public health care workers who should go door-

to-door in an awareness campaign regarding the blesser culture, sexually transmitted infections, and teenage pregnancy. Workshops are given at local municipality level by the local government to reach health care workers in the local communities to facilitate access to teenagers and the youth (Silverman, 2020). Furthermore, Stoebenau et al. (2016) mention that teens and youth have access to knowledge, but they compare that 'knowledge' with the benefits that the blesser culture provides. Smit et al. (2020) suggest that it is essential that healthcare workers be made aware of where teens get their 'knowledge', and this should be included in their training.

Public Awareness of the Blesser Culture

It appears that many people do not pay attention to the warnings about the blesser culture. A concern was raised by the South African government through the Department of Health and Welfare regarding an increase in teenage pregnancies, intergenerational sex practices and new HIV/AIDS infections (Allan, 2018). Furthermore, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health and Welfare (2014-2019), began a three-year campaign in 2016 targeted at warning young people who were participating in the blesser-blessee relationships (Thobejane et al., 2017). Dr Motsoaledi told BBC News that the Department is working to protect young girls aged 15 to 24 who are participating in the blesser culture and intergenerational sex (Allan, 2018).

Moreover, Dr Motsoaledi backed-up UNIAIDS (2014) claim that 2 700 young people aged 15 to 24 are infected with HIV/AIDS in South Africa every week due to the blesser phenomenon. Young South African women are particularly vulnerable to the blesser culture due to a variety of factors, including the lack of economic stability, gender inequality, family breakdown, and the blesser phenomenon. Young individuals, primarily women, having sex with older men in exchange for lavish gifts, is recognised as *intergenerational sex* by scholars, and the new term for this arrangement is *blesser culture* (Allen, 2018; UNIAID, 2014). Furthermore, when introducing a new initiative to combat the alarming incidence of adolescent HIV/AIDS infections, Dr Motsoaledi, accepted the term blesser culture (Allan, 2018). The availability of blessers on an internet platform may have facilitated the meeting of

blessers with the blessees, but it also worsened the ignorance of teenagers and young people, as well as parents who are unable to monitor all of their children's online activities (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019).

The benefits of being a blessee, cause youth, teens and the general public to overlook the dangerous concerns associated with the blesser culture (Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019; Nigusso & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2020; Thobejane et al., 2017). Furthermore, poverty, hunger, unemployment, poor health conditions, the inability to pay university fees, and poor living conditions may exacerbate the underlying dangers associated with the blesser culture (Moyo, 2014; Zawu, 2022).

The Meaning of Risk-Related Terms

Chapter 1 introduced possible risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture, as well as the consequences. This section will focus on a better understanding of the terms: risk factors, risky behaviour and consequences.

The Meaning of the Term 'Risk Factors'

According to the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (2010), risk factors raise the likelihood of a person getting a disorder, enhance harmful habits, exacerbate bad attitudes or aggravate wrong patterns of behaviour. For example, children being separated from their parents receive little or no supervision. Thus, these adolescent children risk becoming involved in the blesser culture to compensate for the love of their absent parents (Kennedy-Clark et al., 2014). This view is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2019) which states that "risk factors are characteristics at biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes" (p. 1).

The Meaning of the Term "Risky Behaviour"

Risky behaviour can also be referred to as risk-taking behaviour. The psychology of risk taking behaviour, define it as anything involving consciously controlled behaviour with a sense of ambiguity about the outcome and potential advantages or costs to ones or someone else's physical, economic, or psychological well-being (Trimpop, 1994). Turner et

al. (2004) stated that there is another description of risky behaviour depending on the topic of inquiry in this broad description. For example, risky behaviour or risk-taking behaviour can be defined as socially prohibited, especially when one is making decisions or choices without being influenced by other people, such behaviour with the potential of negative results if precautions are not followed such as not practicing safe sex, drinking and driving, or drugs usage, or socially tolerated and welcomed behaviour, such as playing the wrestling game, or spinning a car (Turner et al., 2004)

Furthermore, risky behaviour or risk-taking behaviour might be a consequence of becoming involved in the blesser culture. Having that in mind, risky sexual behaviour may put young people and adolescents at risk of sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancy for female blessees every time they engage in unsafe sexual intercourse with a blesser (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016). Although the focus of study of Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2016) was on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the survivor experiences of adolescents after being raped by sugar-daddies, their views highlight similar patterns related to adolescents who are involved in the blesser culture. One such similarity is that the adolescents' involvement in the blesser culture is risky behaviour since the adolescents may contract sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016). Exploitation and dominance by older and wealthier males, increased vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted illnesses are all risks that the adolescent encounters (Leclerc-Madlala, 2004, as cited in Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016). Similar views are expressed by Stoebenau et al (2016) who are of the view that it is a risky behaviour on its own to engage in the blesser culture, transactional sex, or intergenerational sex. These views are supported by Zawu (2022), who states that teens and young people are highly at risk for HIV/AIDS since the usage of condoms when having sex with blessers is less likely when compared with adults. Moreover, Ngum (2012) was discussing teenage pregnancy prevention, stating that risky behaviour includes but is not limited to unprotected sexual intercourse with male or female blessers without the use of a condom; or beginning to be engaged in sexual activity

at a young age. However, it also includes parents in township areas who leave their adolescent children alone when they travel long distances in search of a better paid job (Ngum, 2012). Murudi et al. (2018), when discussing risky sexual behaviour amongst students, are of the opinion that when young individuals begin to have sex with several sexual partners and have sexual experiences with partners who drink alcohol, they are more likely to contract sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS and genital herpes.

The Relevance of Knowing the Risk Factors

In my opinion, knowing the risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture is significant because families, close friends, and society are the most powerful influences on teenagers and youths. Knowing the risks, may persuade families, and close friends to refrain from perpetuating the blesser culture. Furthermore, financial need, for example, may be interwoven with the impact of family on blesser culture participation. Many families embrace the blesser culture because they are faced with poverty, which may influence, inspire, encourage, and urge their children, particularly female children, to participate in the blesser culture directly or indirectly. Consequently, their children endure physical, emotional and health consequences. Family influence might also inspire female children to engage in transactional sex and forego dating in a manner which is accepted as the norm, according to Scull (2022), since they may want to support their parents' values and beliefs and may want to help family members get out of indebtedness. Family pressure, may also play a role in using sex in exchange for money.

Some women who engage in to blesser culture with taxi drivers benefit from emotional support that their sponsors, blessers, provide. Furthermore, women who do not love or want to marry their sponsors, blessers nonetheless speak of their devotion and how they met their emotional needs. In fact, some women stated that they receive more love from their blesser relationships than they did from their parents. Beneficiaries of the blesser-blessee relationships often are encouraged to pursue emotional and financial independence from men (Scull, 2022).

In addition, when being in blesser culture relationship is hurting, Mensah et al. (2022) explore the psychological effect of regret, which is regarded as a common and uncomfortable emotional experience with long-term health and well-being repercussions. The research is based on the psychological theory of regret which defines regret as an emotional reaction to poor decisions made in ambiguous situations. They went on to say that people regret outcomes that they could have influenced in the past and can no longer change and for which they have limited psychological disclosure (Mensah et al., 2022).

Further, evidence suggests that the psychological effects of sexual exploitation are far more widespread (Mlyakado, 2019). Sexual exploitation of adolescents has been linked to detrimental repercussions. Health risks included becoming infected with sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS; unwanted pregnancies and illegitimate abortions; academic-related issues such as low academic results, and losing interest on going to school; and psychological and behavioural issues such as joining bad gangs (Mlyakado, 2019).

According to one study, men and women in the USA are attracted to blesser-blessee relationships because they are presented as fun, exciting, uncomplicated, and mutually beneficial, despite the fact that they are complex relationships with many problems such as emotional, physical, and health consequences (Scull, 2022). Consequently, some of these blessees failed to fulfil their relationship satisfaction goals and ambitions, and missed out on opportunities. This caused regrets, which have bad effects on their psychological health and wellness, based on their ability to deal with the blesser relationship situation (Mensah et al., 2022).

Thus, everyone in the community must participate in prevention, which must be done in a constructive manner. Mlyakado (2019) found that parents in Tanzania made efforts to safeguard and prevent their children and youth from sexual exploitation, while at the same time promoting moral values and beliefs amongst the adolescent children.

Theories Related to the Research Problem

The researcher has reviewed the social exchange theory and sexual economic theory; as well as the theory of planned behaviour, since they were used by other scholars in their respective studies related to the blesser culture. The research problem was that little is known about the risk factors when becoming involved in the blesser culture in informal settlements. The research problem is related to these theories because the blessees are aware of their actions, and they are deliberate about their actions with the intended outcome in mind. Further, the materialistic accumulation motivates the behaviour of the blessees in participating in the blesser culture. One of the reasons for becoming involved in the blesser culture is the exchange of sex for money. Thus, even though the blessees know little about becoming involved in the blesser culture, they are deliberate in engaging in the blesser culture for material accumulation and financial gain.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is the “behaviour emanating from social interactions as a calculated result of materialistic or symbolic resources between at least two parties” (Liu, 2002, as cited in Baumeister & Vohs, 2004, p. 29). This theory examines the costs and advantages of exchange between two individuals. However, an exchange can only happen when both parties have more to gain than to lose. In each social exchange, the exchange analysis assumes that each person gives and receives something from the other. In addition, social exchange entails a sequence of contacts that result in duties; that is, if each party involved believes that their actions are rewarding and of benefit to them, they will reciprocate by giving more (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). Thus, the culture of young men and older women having age-disparate relationships has not been adequately researched and therefore is open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation.”. The general notion is that younger men enter these partnerships with the intention of profiting financially or in terms of material benefits (Montana, 2020).

The biggest advantage for young men in age-disparate relationships is that their social status will be raised once people find out they are in a relationship with older women. Respect on the other hand, is also a significant benefit for younger men in an age-disparate

relationship (Montana, 2020). According to studies in South Africa, adolescent blessees as young as 13 years old participate in sexual acts in order to be recognised by their peers as “not old-fashioned” (Woods et al., 2007, as cited in Ngum, 2012). They will also have sex with blessers two or three times their age in order to receive financial benefits that will set them apart from their peers and sages of their generation (Ngum, 2012). Therefore, in a sexual relationship, social exchange between the young and the elderly is seen as beneficial to both parties. This relationship occurs as a result of a calculated choice, and such choices are expected to be rewarded with money and material goods, including a flamboyant lifestyle.

The social exchange theory, as expressed by Khuzwayo and Taylor (2018) view poverty as the main driving force behind sexual economy; and it is practiced more amongst the young people in the developing townships in South Africa. This view is supported by Dixson and Brooks (2020), who state that the desires of women are subject to a social exchange for a resource that men control and women want. Transactional sex or ‘survival’ sex is practiced solely to meet basic needs such as acquiring food, clothes, and accommodation (Hunters, 2002, as cited in Amo-Adjei et al., 2014). Further, some blessees employ their sexuality to meet their financial obligations such as paying loans, investments, and life covers (Amo-Adjei et al., 2014). Therefore, blessees are getting involved in the blesser culture for survival (Amo-Adjei et al., 2014). Teens and youth are exchanging sex for money in an effort to improve their lives (Hunters, 2002).

Sexual Economic Theory

Whyte et al. (2019) view the foundation of sexual economic theory as being one in which sexual access is an inherently valuable commodity – the availability of which is managed by women, who also derive value from whatever resources the men might provide in return for sex. They add that sex and reproduction should, in theory, be a female-controlled supply in sexual economics. Sexual economic theory is a notion that suggests that economic concepts can be applied to heterosexual mating just as easily as they can to any other micro-level transaction (Baumeister & Vohs 2004; Baumeister et al., 2017, as cited in

Whyte at al., 2019). Thus, according to Dixson and Brooks (2020), where there is consent in a heterosexual partnership, sexual economy is a female-controlled resource that men want, and in which the desires of women are subject to a social exchange for a resource that men control.

Moreover, according to Whyte et al. (2019), sexual economic theory has sparked significant debate in a wide range of domains. For example, a popular news television daily breakfast show in South Africa, The Morning Live on SABC 2, hosted a self-confessed blesser, Serge Cabonge, the country notorious blesser, and a Congolese national who claims to be a business man and uses his wealth and power to have blesser-blessee relationships with women, often without using protection such as condoms when having sex with them (SABC2, 2018). This was confirmed by Leanne Manas, the host of the Morning Live news breakfast show, via twitter (Manas, 2018), claiming that during their interview, Serge Cabonge proceeded to open his expensive Louis Vuitton bag and took out $100 notes to show the crew, and he also produced $1000 on the spot (Manas, 2018). This made many South Africans aware of the persistence of, and the existence of the blesser sexual culture, which consists of the buying and selling of sex. Thus, sexual commerce is a unique, fast growing business – not only in South Africa but across Africa and beyond.

One can forecast how social behaviour will proceed by applying the sexual economic theory to social incentives. The fact that sex is essentially a female resource is at the heart of the sexual economic study of sex. When a woman and a man have sex, the woman is essentially offering the man something of worth. If the man gives the woman something else of equal value, the exchange is not one sided (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). Furthermore, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) perceive sexual economy as an exchange of sex for other goods in the countries where women have little to utilize for accessing the country's goods. Furthermore, despite the fact that Solabomi (2014) discusses transactional sex with the main focus being multiple sex partnerships and not on the blesser culture, his views contribute to the study of the blesser culture in relation to sexual economic theory. His findings do imply that women or men engage in transactional sex for the sake of survival, but he argues that,

grants must be given to those suffering in poverty, rather than leaving them to use sex as a means of survival. Solabomi (2014) further argues that structural interventions such as financial grants should be created to target unemployed men and women, as well as those with low levels of education, in order to ensure access to a means of livelihood; thereby reducing the need for transactional sex amongst those who see it as their only source of income. So, while Solabomi (2014) does not focus specifically on the blesser culture, he does provide clarity on the knowledge and understanding of the blesser culture.

Moodley & Ebrahim (2019), explains how economic factors contribute to gender inequalities, and how women from rural areas moving to urban areas are lured to the sexual industry in order to survive. According to Solabomi (2014) transactional sex is defined as "having provided sex to the sexual partner in exchange for money or resources in exchange for sex" (p. xiv). Moreover, the sexual exchange may not only refer to an exchange of money and sex, but also of sex for comfort, or psychological relief. Hence, children separated from parents who may receive little or no supervision could be at risk for becoming involved in the blesser culture to compensate for the love of absent parents (Amo-Adjei et al., 2014; Kennedy-Clark et al., 2014). As a result of separation from the parents (for whatever reason), the situation exposes children to exploitation by blessers, based on the premise that they are parenting children on behalf of the parents who are separated from their children. In contrast, analysing sexual economy entails more than a few illogical viewpoints from psychological, social, evolutionary biology, political economy, and behavioral economics (Whyte et al., 2019). Analysing sexual economy must be broad to encompass all the facets of life in general.

Sexual economic theory, as research has shown, considers sex to be a female resource rather than a male resource. This portray women as the sole beneficiaries of sex and sex economy, whereas males are portrayed as economic donors who are uninterested in sex and sexual economy. For example, the views expressed by Montana (2020), claims that males are less interested in the transactional aspects of the age-disparate relationship since the haste to decide the terms and conditions of engagement of the relationship are

more important to them than money and material benefits. Women are portrayed as weak, and their insufficiency is highlighted. As a result, this argument is not explicit, and the rationale is biased. Sex as female resource in relation to sex economy theory should be re-evaluated, reviewed and analysed.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Because behaviour can be deliberate and planned, the theory of planned behaviour predicts deliberate behaviour. Aizen (1985, as cited in Titus, 2017) “proposed the idea of planned behaviour as an extension of theory of reasoned action, and is one of the most predictive persuasion theories” (p. 36). According to the theory of planned behaviour, individual relationships and interactions as well as behaviour are influenced by an individual’s attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control. The theory of planned behaviour is frequently used in health research to better understand health-related behavioural intentions. This approach has improved the prediction of intentions in various health-related domains, including condom usage, leisure, and exercise. Furthermore, the theory of planned behaviour, as noted by Titus (2017), is considered one of the most prominent theories for the development of many types of behaviour, and particularly useful for risky health behaviour. The main focus is product behaviour and understanding the factors that drive certain behaviours. The theory of planned behaviour depicts the intentional path to behaviour and identifies the factors that influence a person’s decision to engage in a specific behaviour (Titus, 2017).

Being a blessee is a planned behaviour. The majority of human behaviour is goal oriented, socially motivated, and people make reasonable and rational decisions, according to the theory of planned behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour is a deliberative processing model, which means that people make decisions based on careful analysis of available data of information. It acknowledges the importance of determining the degree to which the person is capable of controlling the behaviour in question (Eaton et al., 2003).

According to Thobejane et al. (2017), poverty cannot be considered as the only motivation for young people to be involved in the blesser culture; rather, blessees plan to be involved in the blesser culture for a variety of reasons, including non-monetary ones.

Some blessees plan to join the blesser culture for survival; while others plan to get involved with blessers for long-term purposes such as education, business or employment; and still others plan to get involved with the blessers for fun, or peer pressure, or status. However, whatever the reason, there are consequences. Bearing that in mind, scholars disagree on whether the blessees are aware of the consequences of participating in the blesser culture. Frieslaar, (2019) suggests that “many young women are lured into relationships that promise luxurious lifestyle” (p. 5) hence they are not aware of the consequences. Montana (2020) disagrees with this viewpoint, claiming that young people enter age-disparate relationships for material and financial rewards. She also rejects the notion that young people are simply victims who are being forced into these relationships because of their desperate socio-economic circumstances; they plan to enter age-disparate relationships. Thobejane et al. (2017) agrees with her and proposes that blessees plan to involve themselves in the blesser culture, irrespective of their awareness of the consequences. As a result, not all young people are getting involved in the blesser culture due to ignorance or due to poverty but the majority of young people are entering into the blesser culture deliberately; they plan it (Thobejane et al., 2017).

There is a constant desire to fit into a group because of peer pressure on social media and other mainstream media, or by observing the lifestyles of their friends who make money that they use to maintain their flamboyant lifestyles (Thobejane et al., 2017). Moreover, this tendency of trying to fit into a group allows young people to plan to join the blesser culture in an effort to please their friends (Mwale & Muula, 2018). Further, they fight to please the peers of their generation to avoid to be chastised and to be labelled as old fashioned (Mwale & Muula, 2018). These young people would not necessarily be labelled as prostitutes, they are often labelled as girlfriends or blessees (Hunter & Zealand, 2002); however their transactional arrangements resemble those of prostitutes (Moyo, 2014).

Moreover, the transactional sex between blesser and blessee is a planned arrangement, and as much as it has harmful consequences, a blesser relationship is not regarded as illegal in a court of law in the Republic of South Africa. However, blesser culture should not be labelled as prostitution because the blesser-blessee arrangement is different from that of prostitution (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Therefore, blessees do not self-identify as sex-workers (Khumalo et al., 2020).

Men traditionally hold a privileged economic role in South Africa, owing to their proximity to the most lucrative sectors of the economy such as housing, construction, and agriculture (Hunter, 2002, as cited in Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019); and as a result, blessees are getting involved in the blesser culture for business opportunities and they are taking advantage of the relationship they have with the blessers to establish their businesses in order for them to gain prominence and strive to remain in prominence in their businesses (Thobejane et al., 2017). Further, blessees are using the blessers, especially the blessers who are politicians and are connected to the government; they are entering into relationships with them to gain access to government tenders. Blessees use the blessers and his/her connections to ‘climb the ladder of success’ and for business opportunities (Zawu, 2022). Moreover, the majority of studies found that financial incentives are a strong motivator for blessees, especially younger women, to participate in sexual relationships with older partners. Such incentives include assistance with income, a viable chance when it comes to employment opportunities, fees for education, or gaining prominence and status among peers of the same generation (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018).

Alternative Points of View

There are, though, different perspectives on the blesser culture phenomenon among studies. Some of these will be discussed.

Blesses are portrayed by various researchers as victims who need to be rescued from the proverbial ‘clutches’ of the blessers (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Moodley and Ebrahim (2019) concur with this viewpoint, stating that there is a lack of empowerment among

blessees from the blessers, because blessers are the cause of blessees being exposed to HIV/AIDS. The Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA (2018), shows that blessers are the ones who seek blessees and contact them for partnerships and sexual relationships. Furthermore, blessees learn about possible blessers within their environment, such as school, community, workplace, as well as social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Websites. Other than online platforms, blessers find the blessees in bar lounges, taverns, and other social gathering places. Moreover, blessers are the ones who initiate the interaction with the blessees, and not the other way around (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018). As a result, in this scenario where blessees contact blessers, the narrative of blessees being victims in the blesser culture is incorrect and unrealistic, because this type of transactional sex requires some amount of agreement and consent from the blessees (Ranganathan et al., 2017).

When there be a desire to consider or understand sexual risk behaviour in South Africa, Eaton et al. (2003) believe there are three domains to consider. These domains should be addressed as: “within the individual; within his or her proximal context; and within the distal context” (Eaton et al., 2003, p. 150). Furthermore, their research concluded that there are three types of sexual risk behaviour that have piqued the interest of South African academics for many years: firstly, being sexually active rather than refraining and deferring sexual activity; secondly, having several partners simultaneously; and lastly, engaging in unprotected sex – which is the improper use, or the absence of, condom use (Eaton et al., 2003). Stoebenau et al. (2016) share similar views regarding behavioural, psychological, and sexual risky behaviours in their study on “Revisiting the understanding of “transactional sex” in sub-Saharan Africa”. However, they differ from other researchers in that they view youth and adolescents as *‘vulnerable victims’*. Thus, ‘sex for fundamental needs’ or ‘survival sex’ maintains the blesser’s importance while in reality strengthening the powerlessness of the blessee, particularly among rural young girls, in heterosexual relationships. Moreover, Stoebenau et al. (2016) see young blessees as trapped and “imprisoned” in physically

dangerous and emotionally destructive partnerships in which money is used to push the young blessee to take greater risks in the sexual encounter and perpetuate further financial dependency (Stoebenau et al., 2016). They also argue that referring to the female blessees as “young girls” is demeaning, insulting, condescending and minimizes their place in society; including viewing rich older men, for example, as preying on “young girls”. Eaton et al. (2003) note that while academics and scholars discovered several behavioural and psychological aspects, their research was primarily undertaken in urban settlement regions, with only a few studies conducted in rural settlement areas. In terms of behavioural, psychological, and sexually hazardous aspects of behaviour, Stoebenau et al. (2016) concur with other findings, in that they agree that behavioural factors entail early sexual encounters.

Summary

The blesser culture can be regarded in a variety of ways. In this study, the blesser culture is examined from a global perspective, where the blesser phenomenon was previously known as the sugar-daddy/sugar-mummy phenomenon, and in some countries, such as the United States of America, it is referred to as ‘sugar relationships’, while in other countries, it is referred to as inter-generational relationships, all of which fall under transactional sex. Over the years, however, several groups and awareness campaigns have been formed to combat wealthy men exploiting young women for their own sexual gratification.

The blesser culture was also examined from the perspective of African culture, which revealed that while African culture has a wealth of desirable characteristics, it also has drawbacks. The drawbacks include the fact that African traditions encourage blessees, particularly female blessees, to seek out blessers to exchange sex for money. For example, males are encouraged to seek work in the formal economy while females are not; males are regarded as inheritors of their parents’ overall inheritance while females do not; and in some African communities, some women are not allowed to attend school because educated girls are regarded as a disgrace to their families. Furthermore, the blesser culture is viewed from the perspective of universities or other institutions of learning, where students participate in

the blesser culture so that their blessers can help them pay for their school fees, books, accommodation and food while they are students. The blesser culture from a cultural perspective suggests that people believe and adopt stereotypical beliefs about sex within the African culture. People have long been fascinated with sex, sexual intercourse, sexual organs, as well as how they function. There is also the stereotypical view that if older men or women who are infected by HIV/AIDS have sexual intercourse with a virgin child, the HIV/AIDS vanishes.

Moreover, the government is pursuing awareness programmes and education to combat the growth of the blesser culture in South Africa. To raise awareness of the blesser culture, the government is collaborating with non-governmental organisations, traditional leaders, and civic organisations.

Thus, greater understanding of the words “risk factor”, “risky or risk-taking behaviour” are further explored in this chapter. Understanding this terminology will make it easier to investigate the blessees’ and blessers’ motives and attitudes.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Perron, 2018; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) serve as the theoretical framework for this study. The research questions were formed and investigated with reference to the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theoretical framework guided the interviews because it informed the development of the interview schedule. Throughout the study, the researcher kept the theoretical framework in mind and used the factors as pointers for probing and clarification.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) developed the ecological systems theory of human development by elaborating on Backer and Wright (1954, as cited in Tudge et al., 2009). However, Barker and Wright (1954) had little to show, or were unable to elaborate on the ramifications of environmental change, including how habitats change and how changes in environment affect humans who were living and growing in such surroundings (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), Bronfenbrenner believed that Barker and Wright's (1954, as cited in Tudge et al., 2009) human development studies were out of context and should have been replaced with ecological study that looked at the interactions between developing people and changing environments in macro and micro contexts. Therefore, the ecology of human development is the study of the human ability to adapt to a constantly changing environment. These developmental processes have with the surrounding environment in which they play a critical role, as well as the part they play in the greater social context, shaped this growth process (Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020).

Until his death in 2005, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development was a constant statement of progress (Tudge et al., 2009). Tudge et al. (2009) go on to say that that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of 1977 and 1979 have been altered, by means of changes, extensions, and revisions. Despite these modifications, additions, and revisions, the theory has always been overtly ecological, emphasizing the importance of person-environment relationships (Tudge et al., 2009).

Bronfenbrenner set out to establish a model of human development that could explain progress without focusing on an individual's flaws, deficiencies, limitations, and shortcomings, as had been the case in previous developmental models (Crawford, 2020). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979b, as cited in Rosa & Tudge, 2013), the ecological systems theory is the ecology of human development that is influenced by various factors such as the person, process, context, and the time in which the individual functions (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Factors Inherent in the Ecological Systems Theory

Factors	Characteristics
Person	Age, gender, competencies
Context	Microsystem, exosystem, macro-system, mesosystem and chrono-system
Process	Intersection between person and context factors
Time	Socio-historical conditions and time since life events

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory considers the *person factor*, which characterises the age of a person, the gender and the competencies. The age and gender of a person should be considered in their involvement and approach to issues (Crawford, 2020; Perron, 2018). Furthermore, each *context factor* that include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem have an impact on the individual's growth and development. *The process factor* is the intersection of person and context. The time factor relates to the socio-historical conditions and time since life events and include the historical circumstances that have shaped life events *factor*. This could imply that a person's functioning may be influenced by the era in which they are living. For instance, the industrial revolution and the age of technological dominance may have influenced people's attitudes towards or involvement in particular issues.

Further, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is described as a theory of human development, with development referring to the stabilities and changes in human bio-

psychological traits across time and between generations (Perron, 2018). The function of factors in the theory: the person, context, process, and time, are all influenced at the same time by numerous context including the microsystem, macrosystem, chronosystem, mesosystem, and exosystem (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). These levels range from smaller, proximal settings where people engage directly to larger, distant settings where an individual's development is directly influenced (Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). The various levels represented in the ecological systems theory as a series of four factors, at the centre of which is an individual. Ecological systems theory was created to help people better understand the human development processes by stressing the importance of the environment and its effect on people. Panopoulos and Drossinou-Korea (2020) are of the opinion that the main characteristic of this theory is that an active, growing, maturing person, and their immediate, or broader social environment may have a permanent impact on that human being.

The context factor plays an important role within the current study and the various contexts or systems will now be reflected upon in more depth

The **microsystem:** Bronfenbrenner defined the microsystem as the layer of the structure that the child interacts with on a day-to-day basis. The microsystem is the layer of the child's immediate environment with which they build close ties. Their close family members, school, and childcare surroundings are examples of microsystem structures where the child forms such bonds and interactions. A teenager's or young person's parents, family members, teachers, church pastors, and anyone else within a close proximity in the environment of the teenager or youth might influence and/or have an impact on their behaviour, thoughts, attitudes, opinions, perspectives, viewpoints and worldviews (Perron, 2018; Crawford, 2020). The child's microsystem is made up of their relationships within their immediate environment (Berk, 2000, as cited in Perron, 2018), and the microsystem's structure includes family, school, neighbourhood, or childcare environments.

The **mesosystem:** Bronfenbrenner defined the mesosystem as a layer that assists in bridging the microsystem structures of a child (Crawford, 2020; Panopoulos & Drossinou-

Korea, 2020). The relationship bridged between the child's tutors and their primary caregivers, are an example of the layer that bridges the mesosystem and microsystem, or between fellow church members and their society, and so on. The mesosystem is the dynamic of how influence from one section of their environment intersects and changes the effect on the other (Perron, 2018).

The **exosystem:** Bronfenbrenner defined the exosystem as the layer that contains the bigger social system. Nevertheless, the children do not have the ability to directly participate in this social system. Because this layer interacts with other system components, the exosystem structure has an impact on a child's day-to-day development (Crawford, 2020; Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). Even though the children do not have the ability to participate directly in the exosystem social system, they are aware of the good, positive, wonderful, beautiful, as well as the terrible, bad, negative and ugly components that affect them at the layers in which they are actively participating. The exosystem is a dimension in which a person's existence has a share of social and economic factors. The social condition in which a person grows up is a significant component in the connections between them. There are several classes of people, *the elite class*; the *stable middle class*; *the vulnerable middle class*; *the transitory poor class*; and *the chronic poor class* (Reeves et al., 2018).

The **macrosystem:** Bronfenbrenner defined macrosystem as the uppermost and a significant layer of child's environment, in which cultural values, customs, religion, laws all play a role (Crawford, 2020; Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). The macrosystem is regarded as the broader role of an individual's general culture. In general, people live according to their culture instead of instinct. To better connect with other people, all persons have to maintain a set of rules, standards, norms and customary rules in society.

The **chronosystem:** Bronfenbrenner defined the chronosystem as a system that encompasses time as it relates to a child's surroundings. There are both internal and external factors that affect the child's life in this layer. The genealogical rearrangement through the passing on of the significant others such as parents are the example of external

factors, while the maturity of physiology such as growing older, may have a significant role to play on the chronosystem layer. Successfully interacting with one's surroundings as children, may have a positive effect because this may be a good foundation to be better able to observe how changes will affect them in future (Crawford, 2020). Finally, the chronosystem is a historical context. The events, which played a major and lasting role, helped a person to become the individual they are. Thus, the ecological systems theory is characterized by four factors namely, person, context, process and time (Crawford, 2020; Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020).

The development context develops an unconscious partiality, and such partiality has an effect on how individuals interact with each other in their environment. It is these unconscious preconditions that shape all interactions with others. It transforms how a person works with children and families, as an individual, a parent, a friend, a health care provider, an educator, and the leader of the church or society (Perron, 2018). Young people and the individuals they interact with on a daily basis may form close bonds. The same environmental influences that affect them all at the same time—the church, school, hospital, or community—also affect these interactions.

Chapter 4: Research Method

Chapter 4 examines the areas related to the method of investigation. This include the paradigm, which is the section covering the philosophical foundation of the study dealing with ontology, epistemology, and methodology, and the research design. The research design encompasses sampling which includes the sample selection consisting of both inclusion and exclusion criteria; population of interest; sample technique; and sample recruitment. Also mentioned, are data acquisition (data collection), and data analysis. Trustworthiness is examined whereby credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are demonstrated, while the ethical considerations are reflected upon.

The research problem is that more information is required about the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture in informal settlements in South Africa.

Research Paradigm

Ontology

The study was conducted from the interpretivist paradigm based on the assumption that the realities that people experience in their social environment vary from one person to another (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Nowell et al. (2017) claim that people's experiences and social contexts are intertwined and subjectively interpreted by the individual. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) concur by saying that the interpretivist paradigm views social reality as experiences implanted and fixed firmly in people within social settings, which they interpret as their social reality, amongst other things, through 'making-sense' of them.

Epistemology

Epistemologically, the interpretivist paradigm allows the social phenomenon to be seen through the "the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher" (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 21). Considering the forgoing, it was significant to conduct the study from a social context by investigating the subjective interpretations of the various participants.

Hence, the interpretive approach was adopted as the study tended to view theory as an outcome of data gathering rather than as the primary motivation for the research (Grix, 2004, as cited in Chatterji et al., 2012).

Methodology

The research methodology that has been followed is the hermeneutic methodology (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). It emphasises an understanding of the social phenomena within the context of the participant through the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The data analysis follows an inductive approach which means that codes, categories and themes emerged from the data.

The study's aim was to explore, in depth, the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture within the context of informal settlements in South Africa by attempting to comprehend a social phenomenon from the perspective of participants. The study design that stemmed from this, will now be discussed.

Research Design

Research Setting and Population of Interest

The current study was conducted in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. As discussed in Chapter 1, Mamelodi Township was selected because this is where my original interest in the research topic developed and the location is more accessible for me. This was particularly essential as participants may have been asked to revisit the questions expressed during the first interviews or to clarify them. The study was carried out at an NGO named Tateni Community Care Service in Mamelodi Township. In 2021, the Metro area population of the Tshwane municipality was 2,655,000; a 3.47% increase from 2020 (Macrotrends, 2021). Participants were sourced from the Tateni Community Care Service. This organisation provides many services like psychosocial assistance for orphans and vulnerable children, developmental skills for young people and the breakdown of the cycle of poverty around and among young people in the Township of Mamelodi. Tateni has 10 drop-in-centres around Mamelodi Township. This non-governmental organization has specifically been chosen for participant access since it deals with orphans and disadvantaged young people. The clients of Tateni do not stay on the premises of Tateni but either reside with their parents or elsewhere such as in rented rooms in Mamelodi Township.

Sampling. The sample consisted of 12 participants aged 18 to 22 years who were blessees living in Mamelodi Township. Some of the participants stayed in the informal settlement but also with their grandparents in Mamelodi Township.

The sample was initially selected using purposive sampling (seven participants were purposefully selected), which is a type of non-probability sampling. As a result, the sampling process had straightforward motives and intentions in order to address the research questions. To increase the number of participants, snowball sampling was used (five participants were selected through snowball sampling), in which participants were asked if they knew someone who fit the criteria for inclusion in the sample. This method was used to increase the sample size when finding prospective participants became difficult.

Sample selection.

Inclusion Criteria. The researcher aimed to include both males and females, between the ages of 18 and 22, in the study. These participants were at the time of the research either in a relationship with a blesser, or had participated in the blesser culture in the past, and were residing in Mamelodi Township.

The participants were in the young adulthood stage – that is a developmental stage according to Erik Erikson (Erikson, 1976, as cited in Cote, and Levine, 1987). The focus is set on this group of participants because they are not only in an *intimacy versus isolation stage*, but they are more accessible to blessers through many platforms including social media (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018).

The researcher included participants from various walks of life, including various African countries, who have come to South Africa for the betterment of their lives and the livelihood of their families back home

In summary, the inclusion criteria are:

- Males and females between the ages of 18 and 22,
- Being in a relationship with a blesser, or who have been in the blesser culture in the past, and

- Living in the Mamelodi.

Exclusion criteria. People older than 22 years have been excluded because they were in a different developmental phase and the gap between the developmental stages was too big. There were also other complicating factors that the researcher considered when omitting potential participants. These factors include blessees who have children with their blessers. This is because this type of relationship between the blessee and the blesser may completely change, and as a result, can no long be considered a blesser-blessee type of relationship.

The researcher purposefully omitted participants younger than 18 years of age as this group would require consent from parents or legal guardians. This may prove difficult to obtain, because obtaining this consent may result in negative consequences for the teenagers; for example, them being punished by their parents for participating in transactional sex and having blessers. In addition, teenagers less than 18 years old were purposefully excluded because information and language used may be explicit and would not be suitable for children younger than 18 years.

In summary, the exclusion criteria are:

- Participants less than 18 years old
- Participants older than 22 years of age
- Blessees having children with their blessers
- A person not being in a relationship with the blesser and/or someone who had never been in a blesser relationship
- Blessees not living in Mamelodi.

Sample recruitment. Participants were selected and recruited after receiving ethical clearance from Unisa (see Appendix D) and permission from Tateni's management to conduct the research (see Appendix B). Tateni made all eligible participants aware of the research (see Appendix E). Furthermore, they provided the venue to enable the research study to be conducted without difficulties.

The researcher worked with an assistant researcher who signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix F) and only assisted in the recruitment process by making people aware of the study process. The researcher and research assistant, worked together to determine an appropriate way to reach out to Tateni clients for participation in the study. The researcher and assistant researcher informed potential participants of the study, but the researcher contacted the participants (see Appendix C). This approach was followed so that potential participants did not feel compelled to participate because a Tateni employee had approached them. In addition, the researcher wanted participants who were willing to share and discuss their experiences and their feelings during their blessee period. After identifying the participants, the researcher met with every participant to clarify the goal of the study and to explain why their involvement was crucial to the success of the study. The researcher was cautious to ensure that participants were meeting the inclusion criteria during the sampling process, not just because they were comfortable and available to participate in the study (De Vos, Fouché & Delport, 2005, as cited in Sugawara & Nikaido, 2014).

Data Collection

Data was collected between April 2022 and August 2022 at Tateni Community Care Service. The data was gathered via personal interviews with the participants; using an open-ended question approach when conducting interviews with the 12 participants from Tateni. The interviews lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour 30 minutes.

The interviews were audio-recorded and the researcher kept field notes. Immediately after the interview the researcher noted down his impressions. This approach was followed in order to “preserve the events in a fairly authentic manner for subsequent data analysis” (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 21).

This has helped to gain a detailed picture of the participants’ experiences and how they have made sense out of it. The semi-structured, one-on-one interview gave the researcher much more flexibility on the interview schedules and in terms of the time frame set for the interviews.

Moreover, face-to-face interviews were conducted because this method has considerable value in that it is much more personal and you can observe the body language of the participants, such as a smile, a frown, and eye contact; but also other observational non-verbal cues of communication such as body movement and posture; the tone of the voice; their gestures, and facial expressions such as being angry, upset, annoyed, happy, or excited. Interviewer was able to ask more in-depth follow-up questions on the emotions exhibited when he can watch for these nonverbal communication signs during the interview sessions. A quiet environment was ensured since the interview took place in a secure office where participants could speak confidentially.

COVID 19 measures were implemented to ensure the safety of the participants and the interviewer.

The researcher did not unnecessarily interrupt the participant and allowed their story to unfold naturally. However, probing was done for the purpose of clarification. The researcher also checked if information related to the questions asked, was covered (see below). If not, the researcher specifically asked these questions:

The following sub-questions were answered:

Introductory question

- How is it to be a young person in this day and time in Mamelodi Township, in Tshwane metropolitan municipality?

Follow-up questions

- How did you become involved in the blesser culture?
- What influence does your blesser(s) have on your life?
- How was your life before becoming a blessee?
- How was/is your life after becoming a blessee?
- Who plays the biggest role in your life? (Probe about blesser and/or family involvement if not mentioned by the participant.)
- What are the advantages of being a blessee?

- What are the disadvantages of being a blessee?
- Many people regard the blesser culture as a form of prostitution, what is your view on this?
- What do you regard as risk factors for becoming a blessee?
- What is your view about campaigns against the blesser culture?

Therefore, throughout the interview, the researcher kept the theoretical framework in mind and used the factors as pointers for probing and clarification (see **Error! Reference s ource not found.**).

Factors	Characteristics
Person	Age, gender, competencies
Context	Microsystem, exosystem, macro-system and chrono-system
Process	Intersection between person and context factors
Time	Socio-historical conditions and time since life events

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim into text using an electronic platform. The data was then manually analysed using MS Excel. The analysis ran concurrently with the interviews and was completed independently during the interviews.

To identity from the data, risk factors for becoming a blessee, the researcher used an inductive approach to data analysis, in which he attempted to identify trends in the data that could be included in major themes. The interpretive approach was used because “the study was tending to see theory as deriving from data collection and not as the driving force of research” (Grix, 2004, p. 108, as cited in Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 56).

The qualitative research of an interpretivist approach known as the *hermeneutic analysis*, established by Lindseth and Norberg (2004, 2020), was employed in this study since it aligns with the methodology. For each transcript, the analysis was done in stages. Reading and re-reading transcripts, taking notes and creating emergent concepts were all be part of the analysis. Once the emerging concepts were identified in the data, the researcher looked for words, sentences as well as events, for further analysis. Therefore, the

relationship between emergent themes was investigated, and similar themes were combined to form major themes. The hermeneutic technique is an attempt to clarify and make sense of a research objective.

Hermeneutic Analysis. Content from a variety of knowledge disciplines can be analysed using hermeneutic analysis. This research demonstrates hermeneutics and its fundamental concepts, as well as how to use them; hermeneutics interprets information. Furthermore, hermeneutics interprets the information or endeavours to make sense of the text, while at the same time focuses on the understanding of the individuals and their experiences. For example, understanding an individual and their social environment is important for interpreting and understanding. However, according to Miles et al. (2013), there is no singular truth; rather, hermeneutics recognises that there are numerous truths. Thus, hermeneutics is a dynamic process which is forever changing, as life is a continuous cycle of activities.

Steps of hermeneutic analysis. There are three hermeneutic concepts, according to Danner (2006) in his text *Hermeneutik*: understanding, responsibility of understanding, hermeneutic circle, and hermeneutic rules. During the hermeneutic investigation, these concepts are complimentary to one another.

Concept 1: Understanding. Vieira and Queiroz (2017) are of the view that, "*Understanding* is the recognition of anything as human: all sounds identify as words are detected, as are their meanings" (p. 10). The explanation via structural analysis is used to test a basic grasp of narrated lived experience. It is the meaning of lived experience that is the focus of such inquiry, not the validity of beliefs (Lindseth, 2021). Moreover, Lindseth and Norberg (2004) are of the opinion that narrating and listening to others' narratives are the most basic ways to develop insight of our own experiences. When we listen to other people's stories about how they responded in various situations, we can gain a better understanding of moral conduct. They further suggest that a naive interpretation of the text is formed from an initial reading. The text is then broken down into meaning units, which are then condensed and abstracted to generate sub-themes, themes, and maybe primary themes,

which are finally validated by comparing them to the naive understanding (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). As a result, narrative interviews are a good way of revealing the meaning of lived experience. Moreover, Lindseth and Norberg (2004) are of the view that we have a preconceived notion of life that manifests itself in the form of stories. We categorise our experiences to answer questions such as “who” did "what," "why," "how," "with whom," "to whom," and "for whom". Thus, experiences lend significance to specific events and, in turn, to the entire story.

Concept 2: Naive Perception of Understanding. According to Lindseth (2021), to grasp an overall sense of the person’s lived experience, it must be read or looked at numerous times. Further, the naive interpretation of the text is expressed in phenomenological terms. It is regarded as a preliminary hypothesis that must be confirmed or refuted by future structural analysis. The structural analysis is thus guided by the naive understanding. Thus, themes are considered in light of the naive understanding, and the inquiry is whether the themes confirm or refute the naive understanding. If the structural analysis invalidates the naive understanding, the entire person’s lived experience must be read or looked at again, and a new naive understanding must be constructed and evaluated using a new structural analysis.

Concept 3: Improving Understanding. When we narrate from lived personal experience and write it down, we create an autonomous text, one that has its own meaning. There is no need to correct the narrative by giving facts because it is already correct. This does not, however, imply that the story is a work of fiction (Lindseth, 2021).

The following structural elements can be distinguished by *understanding*; this process takes place in a notion called *Understanding* (Vieira & Queiroz, 2017) which includes:

- We identify something, which is a true sensory operation.
- We recognise that or something like to a human being

- We instinctively recognise (reflexively understand) its significance, the meaning of being human

Finally, according to Danner (2006, as cited in Vieira & Queiroz, 2017), the hermeneutic notion of *Understanding* is oriented in human activities, intelligence, language structures, and non-linguistic phenomenon.

a) Understanding responsibilities

Subjectivity is determined by random arbitrariness and simple self-awareness, and is seen purely on a psychological level. On the other hand, in terms of generality, any statement is accessible at all times in light of the scientific ideal. Hermeneutics is used to carry out both options (Vieira & Queiroz, 2017).

b) Hermeneutic circle

When a larger *Understanding* occurs, a repeated movement appearing in a repetitive fashion occurs. Because it is a circular movement, it is referred to as a hermeneutic cycle. The movement of the circle is visible, yet it is neither a closed circular movement nor a spiral movement. The many hermeneutics methods, each in its own manner, attempt to solve the dilemma (Vieira & Queiroz, 2017). The hermeneutic cycle, according to Miles et al. (2013), is the cyclical and repetitive action, to-and-fro, in the text in order to find new and meaningful interpretations. The hermeneutic cycle has been employed as a means of interpreting and clarifying what it means to have life experiences by allowing us to have a better knowledge of our daily experiences. Furthermore, Lindseth (2021) proposes a three-step hermeneutic circle: First step, we are familiarising ourselves with a text. We receive an immediate sense of what the text is about based on our prior knowledge. This is what he referred to as a "first" or "naive" reading of the text. In the second stage, we look at the text closely to see how its elements fit together and establish a structure for the text's meaning nexus. Finally, we return to the entire text in order to construct a holistic understanding that incorporates a variety of theoretical views. This type of comprehension is referred to as “critical” or “thorough” understanding. Thus, Lindseth (2021) is of the view that we may speak of a hermeneutic spiral rather than a circle as we gain a greater knowledge and progress to a

higher level. We choose the phrase hermeneutic cycle to emphasise the fact that understanding must always be predicated on understanding.

c) Rules of hermeneutics

According to Danner as cited in Viera and Queiroz (2006), there are some rules to follow when reading to understand a text (see Table 2).

Table 2

Rule of hermeneutics

Rules	Explanation of the rule
Preliminary interpretation	Use the text's publishing as an opportunity to form your own opinion about it and write about the text's overall meaning.
Interpretation of immanent text	Entails searching for meaning in words and grammatical relationships; observing the logic of the text; and spotting contradictions.
Coordinated interpretation	Pay attention to the text's context, as well as the affirmations and contradictions of hypothesis.

Trustworthiness

Strategies to achieve trustworthiness of the outcomes have been used. The trustworthiness of the study has been considered in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017). Face-to-face interviews were conducted to keep the events and the information provided by participants genuine, and to give a true account of the participant's personalities, values, and spirit; this was followed to obtain reliable data (Gall et al., 2003, p. 21, as cited in Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

Credibility

The findings of the study have been verified by the researcher by double checking the information gathered during the interviews. The findings of the study have been verified by the supervisor to ensure that the findings and the data collected correspond. Through the design of an interview schedule, as well as following a thorough analysis method and having the supervisor examine the results of the analysis, the researcher ensured that the study

elicited credible results. One of the most significant components in building trustworthiness, according to Shenton (2004) is assuring credibility. When researchers are confronted with the event they can relate to or recognise, the study's trustworthiness is determined (Shenton, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017). The "compatibility" between the participant's views and the researcher's representations of the participants is referred to as credibility (Tobin & Begley, 2004, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). The supervisor offered advice on conducting external checks on the research process, which boosted credibility; and checked referential adequacy as a way of comparing findings and interpretations of data (Shenton, 2004). As a result, credibility was established by addressing the "compatibility" between participant's opinions and the researcher's portrayal of them.

Transferability

The study was transferable since comprehensive descriptions of the study, the setting of the study, and the sample interviewed can be provided. As a result, the study's researcher showed that the findings are applicable to various locations, settings and situations, people, and phenomenon (Shenton, 2004). According to Nowell et al. (2017) "Transferability refers to the generalizability of inquiry" (p. 3). In qualitative research, however, this concern only applies to case-to-case transfer (Tobin & Begley, 2004, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017).

Dependability

Readers are able to verify the research's dependability by following the researcher's process for ensuring transferability. In addition, if other researchers desire to conduct the same research, they will be able to do so with the information provided in the dissertation (Shenton, 2004). The researcher attained dependability with the support of the supervisor by ensuring that the study methods were rational, traceable, and well-documented. Through the auditing process, the researcher demonstrated the study's trustworthiness and dependability (Nowel et al., 2017). Thus, the readers who have access to the study's methods will be able to assess the researcher's dependability (Nowell et al., 2017; Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a qualitative researcher's concern that is comparable to objectivity. The researcher, with the help of the supervisor, took the necessary steps to ensure that the conclusions of the study are, as far as possible, a true reflection of the participants' experiences, thoughts, ideas, point of views, and perspectives, rather than the researcher's qualities and preferences. The findings of this study reflect the true responses of the participants. Any bias and/or personal motivations of the researcher were prevented by continuous reflection by the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher, therefore, ensured that the findings were clearly drawn from the data collected. The researcher also showed how conclusions and interpretations were obtained (Shenton, 2004). When the criteria of credibility, transferability, and dependability have all been met, confirmability is also achieved (Guba & Lincoln 1989, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017).

The researcher has stressed the importance of triangulation in an effort to boost confirmability, with the goal of reducing the effect of the researcher's bias in this study (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical considerations

The Ethical Research Committee of the University of South Africa has given its approval for the study (see Appendix D). Additionally, permission to conduct research at Tateni Community Care Service was requested (see Appendix G) after which a letter of approval to conduct the research was obtained from Tateni Community Care Service (see Appendix B). These included that data collection was done after obtaining informed consent from the participants (see Appendix C) and that participant were to be referred to the Tateni Community Care Service' psychologist for further interventions, should they have experienced psychological reactions due to the study. This was, however, not needed.

The study also applied the general principles as stipulated by the APA (2017) under its *ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. These principles include beneficence and non-maleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for people's rights and dignity (APA, 2017) which are detailed below.

Principle A: Beneficence and Non-maleficence

The study aimed to protect the participants' wellbeing and welfare by ensuring that the location where the interview took place was safe and appropriate for conducting research. The study has sought to preserve the rights of those from whom we obtained data by ensuring that the confidentiality of the information they provided was not violated, as well as their right to refrain and withdraw from the study at any time (APA, 2017).

The following are some ways which were used in the current study to ensure confidentiality. The researcher used a secure server to store data. Removing identifying information from databases that contain sensitive data. The researcher refrain from keeping participant's records from public domain. The researcher also avoided discussions of research findings in public forum

Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility

The study has been designed to be trustworthy to participants, with no reward, compensation or personal advantages and benefits to participants. This means that all participants were informed that taking part in this study would not result in no monetary gain, either directly or indirectly. Thus, this study did not give any form of compensation, reimbursements, gifts, or services to the participants. Participants participated voluntarily. During the session refreshments such as water, coffee and soft drinks were funded and provided by the researcher. Moreover, this study aimed at eliminating conflicts of interest that could result in exploitation or trauma or harm; and the researcher was committed to upholding professional ethical standards of conduct, fulfilling professional duties and obligations, and taking appropriate accountability (APA, 2017).

Principle C: Integrity

The study was designed to promote accuracy, honesty, sincerity and truthfulness by recording the conversations between the interviewer and the interviewees; ensuring that the data collected were evaluated, interpreted, and analysed in the way the participants presented it; and by ensuring that the study did not engage in malevolent research. Additionally, the researcher strove to uphold accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in the study; he did not engage in fraud, subterfuge, or deliberate distortion of the facts. Moreover,

the researcher strove to honour his commitments and refrained from making rashed or uncertain decisions. Consequently, the researcher strove to maintain integrity by adhering to prescribed moral and ethical standards. Adherence to these standards ensured that the study focused on the most beneficial benefits, while minimising any chance of harm. The researcher had a serious obligation to think through the potential repercussions of using ethically and morally acceptable tactics, as well as his obligation to address any mistrust or other negative effects that may follow (APA, 2017).

Principle D: Justice

The study ensured that participants were treated fairly and that all information was treated as confidential. During the research procedure, no participant was made to feel unimportant, insignificant, or less than themselves; everything was done to ensure that all participants were treated fairly and justly. Further, the researcher acknowledged that justice and fairness entitled everyone to have equal access to and benefit from the study's contributions as well as to the same quality of processes, procedures, and services provided by the researcher. As such, the researcher employed reasonable judgement and took appropriate safety precautions to make sure that his potential biases, his competency boundaries, and the limitations of his expertise did not encourage or result in unfair practices (APA, 2017).

Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

The dignity and value of participants were respected throughout the study, as were their rights to personal privacy, confidentiality of the information submitted, and self-determination. Participants' identities were kept private (APA, 2017).

Summary

In this chapter, the research paradigm that include ontology, epistemology and methodology were reflected upon. The ontology was embedded in the interpretivist paradigm of the study and based on the assumption that the realities that people experience in their social environments are unique. The epistemology captured the idea that the study reflects the true lived experiences of the participants as they are the people who went through these

experiences. The research methodology that has been followed is the interpretive methodology. The study's aim was to achieve the objectivities of interpretive methodology by attempting to comprehend a social phenomenon in the sense of participants.

The current study was cross-sectional and followed a qualitative approach. It was conducted in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. Qualitative data was collected from twelve participants between the ages of 18 and 22, over an extended period of time in the form of audio-recordings of semi-structured interviews.

The research design included the inclusion and exclusion criteria and justification for these decisions; the sampling technique; participant recruitment; and sample selection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information to help gain a detailed picture of participant's experiences and how they made sense out of it. The semi-structured, one-on-one interviews gave both the interviewer and interviewees much more flexibility with regard to the interview schedules.

Trustworthiness was examined whereby credibility, transferability, dependability (reliability), and confirmability are shown. Ethical considerations were examined, with an emphasis on ethical considerations addressed in this study which include beneficence and non-maleficence, fidelity and responsibilities, integrity, justice, respect for people's rights, and dignity.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter outlines the results of the hermeneutic analysis that was conducted. The results are discussed under three themes, namely risk factors, benefits and drawbacks.

Demography

The sample for the study was drawn using purposive sampling. When it was difficult to reach potential volunteers, snowball sampling was utilised. Males and females between the ages of 18 and 22 who lived in Mamelodi Township, were eligible to participate in the study. Furthermore, they either had to be in a relationship with a blesser or had previously been involved in the blesser culture. Blessees who had children with their blessers, or who were married to, or cohabiting with their blessers, were excluded because their relationship with their blessers could no longer be classified as a blesser-blessee relationship. A reflection of the demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Biographical Profile of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Educational Background	Employment
P01	Female	18 years	Grade 11	Unemployed
P02	Female	19 years	Matric	Unemployed
P03	Female	18 years	Matric	Unemployed
P04	Female	22 years	Senior certificate	Unemployed
P05	Female	19 years	Grade 11 drop out	Unemployed
P06	Male	19 years	Matric	Unemployed
P07	Male	19 years	Matric	Unemployed
P08	Female	20	Grade 10 drop out	Unemployed
P09	Male	21 years	Senior certificate	Part-times jobs
P10	Female	19 years	Senior certificate	University
P11	Male	22 years	Senior certificate	Unemployed
P12	Male	19 years	Senior certificate	Unemployed

Most of the 12 participants were female (n=7). In agreement with the selection criteria, the participants ranged in age between the ages of 18 and 22, with an average age of 19.6 years.

Almost all the participants were unemployed with only one being a university student and another holding part-time jobs. One blessee reported to have a child although this child of one-year-old, was from a relationship other than with her blesser.

Life in Mamelodi Township

To begin with, the participants were requested to provide an overview of life in Mamelodi Township. Life in Mamelodi Township refers to the experiences, activities and way of life that are typical of being in Mamelodi society or circumstances, as well as the lifestyle that the youth of Mamelodi Township lead. This is a comprehensive description of how young individuals in Mamelodi Township community spend their lives, including what they do and experience, based on information provided by the participants.

Life in Mamelodi Township may be normal; a person may have a pleasant and quiet life. When you have money, Mamelodi Township is an excellent location to be in since it allows you to attend parties and have a nice time. Furthermore, the participants believe that Mamelodi Township provides them with positive and amazing experiences since they may learn from their surroundings.

On the other hand, Mamelodi Township could be a difficult place to live in due to peer pressure, unemployment and a divide between the rich and poor classes. Youth from poor families' desire to be like youth from rich families. There is inaccessibility to goods such as cell phones and clothes, which they cannot purchase because they do not work and cannot afford it.

The participants had different perspectives about the education they received in Mamelodi Township. According to some participants, Mamelodi Township seemed to lack the facilities that motivate young people to perform to the best of their potential. While other opinions suggested that deteriorating school infrastructure prevented students to develop and become better versions of themselves. Other opinions suggested that the education received in Mamelodi Township was good. Yet young people's yearning for freedom to do as they like without fear of consequences could potentially strain the lives of young people, especially those who are still enrolled in school.

According to the participants, youth in Mamelodi Township believe they are being treated unfairly because of robberies and theft. There is also increased corruption committed by adult members of Mamelodi Township because they deceive teenagers and pose as their friends while seeking sexual benefits.

Thus, life in Mamelodi Township has many facets, but could potentially put a strain on the youth, particularly those who are still in school. This is because they desire to do anything they please without being reprimanded by teachers. However, at school, one cannot do whatever one likes as it requires self-discipline, dedication, and a focus on the end goal. One of the difficulties that some youth of Mamelodi Township community faces is that their parents are unable to provide them with what they need. As a result, the youth must figure out how to earn money in order to survive. As a result, adult residents of Mamelodi Township accuse the youth of being problematic. Many youths in Mamelodi Township smoke, take drugs, and drink alcohol. Although the youth of Mamelodi Township have solid relationships with other youth, a lack of jobs and labour prospects are problematic.

The Results in a Nutshell

Table 4 provides a concise reflection of the results of the study that address the research problem.

Table 4

Themes and Sub-Codes

Themes	Sub-Codes
Theme 1: Risk factors	Need for money
	Home-situation
	Peer pressure
	Awareness of the blesser culture
Theme 2: Benefits	Monetary benefits
	Educational support
	Emotional wellbeing
	Travel

Themes	Sub-Codes
	Fulfil expressed needs
Theme 3: Drawbacks	Negative health consequences
	Physical abuse
	Power dynamics
	Emotional deterioration

Theme 1: Risk Factors

Risk factors refer to those circumstances that place a youth from Mamelodi Township at risk of becoming involved in the blesser culture. This addresses the research question:

> What are the risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in the Republic of South Africa?

The four risk factors that are examined in this study are a need for money, the participants' home situation, peer pressure and awareness of the blesser culture.

Need for Money

The need for money emerged because many participants felt responsible for providing a flamboyant lifestyle for themselves – one they had always envisioned; to eradicate their current circumstances of poverty; to pay for school and related activities for themselves; and to take care of their family members, including their parents.

Poverty and Lifestyle Needs. According to the participants, some young people in Mamelodi Township do not take school seriously. All they want is to have money, without necessarily working for it. They are willing to go where the money is.

> They [the youth] don't take schools seriously. They just want money. They all follow money where the money is they go. (P05)

Other participants felt that it is a good idea for them to have pocket money, and this money is going to be very helpful to them because they are learners who are still studying. Moreover, they felt that extra money will help them along in other areas of their lives.

So I just see it as a good thing for me to have pocket money because I'm still studying. So I think it's better for me to get a little bit extra money from my blesser. (P09)

There was also the view that because the economy of the country is down and employment is scarce it becomes difficult to obtain money.

Economy of the country is down, people we don't have jobs and we don't have enough activities we can do to benefit ourselves to be in the better position, so we don't have choice, we have to go on with what is there on the ground. (P09)

Furthermore, the participants expressed that they got involved in the blesser culture for an opportunity to earn money on a monthly basis

You will be earning money each and every month (P06)

When asked by the researcher, what are the advantages of getting involved in the blesser culture? Participant 6 responded as follows:

[The] advantage is that you can have money.

Thus, some participants felt that they got involved in the blesser culture because their friends had money which they got from their blessers while they themselves did not have money. This made them get involved in the blesser culture so that they too were able to obtain money. The participants testified that many young people in Mamelodi Township got involved in blesser-blessee relationships because they want to have money. They love money.

I think they like money. Because many youth love money. (P06)

As a result, the need for money became a risk factor in that a participant was motivated to join the blesser culture.

Money, which I couldn't get it at home. (P08)

At the core of all of this seemed to be poverty and lifestyle needs. Poverty was referred to by the participants as a lack of wealth or financial gain at home. Poverty and lifestyle needs emerged as part of the *need for money* risk factor for becoming involved in the blesser culture.

Some young people in Mamelodi Township got involved in the blesser culture because they felt that they were poor and wanted to change the poverty status quo.

> I got involved in this blesser culture because of my home situation. My parents were very poor to can afford anything that I want. (P08)

> My life was bad; I couldn't even afford to buy airtime. I couldn't even afford to buy data. (P011)

Therefore, the frequent unmet financial needs of youth in Mamelodi Township, together with the inability of their parents to support them financially to purchase the pricey products they desire, drove them to seek for a means to sponsor their needs, which led them to seek blessers.

According to the participants, blessees enter into the blesser culture to receive money as compensation for the services they provide to the blesser. This financial compensation is given in exchange for sexual activity. Therefore, blessees become part of the blesser culture because they need or want more money.

> My parents were very poor to can afford anything that I want…Some [got involved in the blesser culture] because they want money or because they want nice things or expensive things for themselves. (P03)

Many youths in Mamelodi Township get involved in the blesser culture because they want money to buy expensive things. They want money to buy good things for themselves and to improve their standard of living.

> They want to wear expensive clothes; they compare themselves to each other. So some of the youth's status does not allow them to live a lavish life, so they end up falling for blessers (for money). (P11)

> I was involved in this culture because I wanted more things, fancy things. (P08)

Some participants indicated that their lives were boring because they were always crying about money, they had needs for money to make them feel good and joyful.

> My life was boring because I was always crying about the money. (P01)

They perceive their boring lives as an emotional deterioration and as negative for their psychological well-being.

> I was depressed about the money. I was needing the money the most. Because I was only needing the money to help myself, to find something better for me, like to do many things that other girls are doing. (P01)

The participants indicated that they wanted money to buy items such as clothes, phones and shoes. There is a peer pressure amongst the youth regarding new fashion trends.

Therefore, some participants became involved in the blesser culture because their parents did not provide for their needs. They felt that what their parents were giving them was not good enough and they wanted more than what they were receiving at home. In the end, they decided to get involved in the blesser culture.

> Even though my parents were trying a lot so they can provide me the needs I need. As a teenage boy, there are lots of things I need. (P07)

Therefore, poverty and lifestyle needs are risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture because youth in Mamelodi Township do not accept their poor home background. Poverty, or perceived poverty at home, have pushed young people towards getting involved in the blesser culture.

School and Related Activities. The participants needed money to pay for their school fees while there were school programmes that required money. That made it difficult for young people when they did not have money to pay for school and school programmes.

> The reason why I'm involved is because I had no money to go to school. (P05)

They felt that by getting involved in the blesser culture they would be able to obtain money for their school and school-related activities.

> It was when in 2021, when I was doing the 11th grade, I was supposed to go on a school trip. Then I was supposed to go in Durban with my schoolmate, but then at home situation was not good for my parents to pay the amount that it was needed as

> good for me to go to the trip. The trip was going to help me a lot with my career and career choices that I'm going to choose in the future. (P07)

The participant's need for money to attend school and to afford school-related activities became risk factors since they got involved in the blesser culture to obtain it.

Similarly, Participant 10 got involved in the blesser culture because he needed money to go on a school trip. Participant 10 and his school mate had no money to pay for the school trip which was important for them and their educational qualifications. When blessers approached them, they agreed to be in sexual relationships with the blessers. The blessers paid for their school fees and trips.

Thus, the *school related activities* emerged as part of the need for money risk factor because it led young people to involvement in the blesser culture.

Taking Care of Family. Some participants testified that they had obligations such as taking care of family members including siblings, parents and other family members. They felt that they had to do anything possible, including getting involved in the blesser culture, to take care of their family members.

> You find that you do not have money to take care of your child, so you just have to [get involved in the blesser culture] because you have to get money which you do not have. You find yourself putting everything aside and focus on what you need. (P02)

Home Situation

Money-related matters were presented by all the participants as a reason for becoming involved in the blesser culture. The home-situation emerged as a notable risk factor, although it was not mentioned by all the participants.

When talking about the home-situation, it refers to an undesirable circumstance prevailing at a particular time or an underlying unpleasant event in a place where a participant lives permanently. This is when the situation at home is not ideal and becomes unbearable to the participant, pushing them to seek blesser-blessee relationships as a result. Note that in this case, it excludes poverty and related matters. Thus, *home situation* is a risk factor since it can result in leading someone to become involved in the blesser culture.

> The majority of the times, it's because of the background of the families. (P07)

The abuse with regard to the enforcement of discipline emerged as a risk factor. An authoritarian parenting style, which includes harsh punishment, may contribute to youths in Mamelodi Township getting involved in the blesser culture. This was clearly attested to by Participant 01 who indicated that she got involved in the blesser relationship due to the parenting style at her home.

> [at home] there will be a punishment, like, they will beat me up, or they do not give me food or money to eat at school.

The participant was of the view that she got harsh punishment from home, and the punishment came either in the form of a beating, denying her food, or withholding school pocket money.

An Alternative View. The family of other participants played a positive role in their lives. When asked by the researcher about who played the biggest role in her life, a participant responded with

> It's my family because they advised me to go to school and then they give me some money so that I can buy food at school. (P06)

While another said that

> I can see that they are trying. They can give me some that is something I need to provide me so I can get whatever I want. They are really trying. (P07)

Moreover, the families of the blessees played a supportive role towards the blessees and their overall goals and whatever they wanted to do, as evidenced in this statement:

> I can say it is my family, because all that they wanted was for me to go to school, get educated, and be a better person. (P08)

Thus, even though some participants felt that their families were not fulfilling their personal needs, they also regarded their families as the ones who played an important role in their lives. These families wanted the participants to go to school and better their lives, and supported and encouraged them to fulfil their goals and dreams, as stated above by participant P08.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure, in this study, was either the deliberate or unintentional behaviour performed by youth in the same age group as the participants; this behaviour influenced them to become involved in a blesser-blessee relationship. Peer pressure is regarded as a risk factor because the participants' desire to fit-in and not to be seen by their friends as old fashioned, influenced them to become involved in the blesser culture:

> You just do it because you feel it's all peer pressure. (P01)
>
> Some is because of peer pressure. (P03)
>
> Because of peer pressure. That's one of the things. Peer pressure. (P11)

In some cases, friends deliberately introduced participants to blessers to persuade them to join a blesser-blessee relationship. The feeling of Participant 01 of being pushed by her friends to participate in the blesser culture, may be viewed as an act of being forced and not an act of free will, or merely a common influence of peer pressure.

> but friends pushed me to have that blesser…Yes, they [my friends] are the ones who have pushed me to have a blesser. (P01)

There seemed to be some blame shifting on the part of the participants, because these participants related their need for money to the actions of their friends influencing them to join, or to become involved in blesser-blessee relationships. Furthermore, despite the fact that friends were the ones who influenced the participant to become active in the blesser-blessee relationships, the onset of sexual awakening also had a big impact and played a role in them becoming involved in the blesser-blessees culture. This became evident when participant P05 said:

> I was just a kid. But now maybe the reason why I did that is because of a peer pressure or adolescent stage.

On the other hand, some participants have testified that they were introduced to the blesser culture by others. The participants said that they were introduced to the blesser culture by friends.

> They (my friends) introduced me to one of their boyfriends' friends (blesser). (P04)

Participants learned about the blesser culture from their friends who were also participating in it. Others that participate in the blesser culture were introducing the blesser culture to others who did not participate in it. This was confirmed by Participant 5 who, when asked if there was anyone who had introduced her to the blesser culture, replied:

> I have been introduced by my two friends at school. Yes, they've been there, and they were as well involved in the blesser culture.

Thus, the participants admitted that among the youth, there was a tendency to influence one another to join blesser-blessee relationships. In their influencing of one another to be involved in blesser-blessee relationships, youths created unhealthy competition amongst each other about who owned expensive clothes or phones, who travelled, had money, and other material possessions. As a result, it created the impression that getting involved in a blesser-blessee relationship ensured that they were seen as ‘cool’, seemed better than others, were not labelled as old fashioned, or were viewed as ‘different’ from their peers.

> They [the youths] just create a useless competition for themselves. (P11)
>
> You see at school you get some influences where you get to find someone who is also in that culture. (P02)
>
> Not good, because there's a lot of people who have bad influence from (blesser) cultures. And everywhere you learn different things, and some are bad things. (P04)

Awareness of the Blesser Culture

Within the context of a need for money, becoming aware of the blesser culture was a risk factor in itself. Some participants were introduced to the blesser culture by friends while other became aware of this culture when they were approached by potential blessers. As was the case with Participant 8 who said:

> I'm the one who introduced my life for it. No one else.

Some participants said that they were not introduced by anyone to the blesser culture, and there was no peer pressure by friends. They willingly got involved in the blesser culture. In addition, these participants said that they met their blessers coincidentally and

they did not plan on meeting them. They either met blessers on street as they were walking or in a shopping centre, or in their work place. Participant 10 stated:

> I was on my way back to school. I was still in high school, so, there came The Blesser with the BMW. And I pretty much liked the car. And he was very nice to me, and he took me out for lunch. And that was it. That's how I got involved.

And Participant 11 explained:

> I met a blesser back in the days, I think it was last year. And I met her at the Grove mall. She just approached me. She started giving me her numbers. She actually gave me her business card and she told me that she's going to provide everything for me. So I saw an opportunity that day. I grabbed it with my both hands.

Theme 2: Benefits

Benefits are seen as positive consequences of being in a blesser-blessee relationship. These benefits are only experienced after becoming involved in the blesser culture and may inspire blessees to remain in their blesser-blessee relationships. The blessers entice young people with these benefits for their sexual gratification and sexual favours. This study found that the participants benefitted in various areas such as emotional wellbeing, money, travel, educational support, survival, material accumulation, and the fulfilment of expressed needs. They, therefore, gained what they wanted from these relationships.

Some participants suggested that their blessers were the ones creating a conducive environment for them to fulfil their goals and dreams.

> The advantages of being a blessee I think, I got dreams and my blesser helped me to reach some of my goals as we speak. And I think if it wasn't because of her, I wouldn't be where I am today. So she helped me a lot. (P11)

The benefits gained from the blesser culture are relevant to the purpose of the research because it could become a risk factor for other youths who are enticed into becoming involved in a blesser-blessee relationship.

Monetary Benefits

Monetary benefits refer specifically to the money offered to blessees by their blessers in exchange for sexual favours. Material accumulation is the process of gradually obtaining more and more possessions, including clothing, over a period of time and is part of involvement in the blesser culture.

Money is a tangible resource, and as such, when it is given by the blessers and received by the blessees, it is considered to have positive consequences.

> He makes it easy for me to attain other things that I do not get when I do not have money because he provides money for me to get something I cannot get. (P02)

Money was a positive consequence because the money offered to the participants was a benefit derived from participating in the blesser-blessee relationship. Moreover, receiving money and other wonderful benefits from the blessers aligned with the need for money which was, in the first place, a risk factor for becoming involved in the blesser culture.

Despite the fact that the participants were motivated to participate in the blesser culture by a desire to live a decent life, their main objective was to obtain benefits in the form of money. The participants emphasised that someone extending their hands to offer money was a good thing.

> This experience is very good because someone extend herself and gives you money. (P06)

> Advantage is to get the money. (P05)

Participants profit from the blesser by receiving money each month.

> But now it's easy to get some amount of money every month. (P06)

This is a beneficial result of being connected with the blesser culture, because participants were able to afford a balanced financial life and attend school.

> He makes it easy for me to attain other things that I do not get when I do not have money because he provides money for me… (P02)

Initially, all the participants stated that they were interested in a blesser-blessee relationship due to their need for money. With the money they received, they were able to

purchase tangible items such as clothing, shoes, and food, as well as use the money they received from the blessers to travel and pay for their education.

> For me, I benefit, like material stuff, like cash, clothes and all the stuff. And I can able to buy something I can't able to buy it if I'm not having a blesser. (P09)

Moreover, the need for money being given by a blesser and being able to accumulate material possessions, were positive consequences for getting involved in the blesser culture.

As a consequence of their involvement with a blesser, the participants could afford various benefits.

> I can afford anything I want, and I can also take care of my child. (P02)
>
> They [blessers] can buy me things…I was now able to afford myself and I can assist my parents with many things…you can now afford yourself. (P03)
>
> So that I can afford my things. (P04)
>
> Being a blessee has been very good because you get the things that you want, you can afford, many people does not always look down on me like they used to do before. (P12)

Educational Support

A benefit from being involved in the blesser culture was to obtain, from the blesser, financial assistance for education. The benefits of being involved in blesser-blessee partnerships were monetary advancement and accumulation, as well as the stability in the lives of the recipients. This financial gain enabled the blessees to meet their educational needs, such as paying for accommodation, purchasing food, and other resources such as books and tuition fees.

> He pays for my studies. He pays for my accommodation. He provides food for me. Yes. He's very supportive. (P10)

This aligns with the risk factor *school and related activities* as part of the need for money and contributes toward fulfilling this need. In addition, blessers are able to offer helpful advice and positive affirmations. This shows that *school and related activities* are a

part of the need for money, and are a risk factor because the blessers also support them in the educational endeavours. Blessers' words give hope for the future.

> He or she can influence you to focus on the schoolwork so you can have a bright future, like he or she can be a parent to you, to help you, even though it's not what she or he wants. (P07)

The blessers can be helpful by providing positive reinforcement, feedback, and encouragement on the academic development of the blessees.

Emotional Wellbeing

In this study, emotional wellbeing emerged as the positive experiences of happiness, joy, pride, exuberating excitement, and a feeling of overwhelming greatness, or feeling a sense of stability. The participants' emotional wellbeing were influenced by their blesser-blessee relationships.

Happiness and pride were contributing to the emotional wellbeing of the participants. The availability of money may be a tangible resource, but it contributed greatly to the emotional wellbeing of the participants. This became evident when participant P01 said:

> To have more money. I become happy.

She went on to emphasize the fact that physical resources may have an effect on the emotional wellbeing of blessees by saying that:

> I find more money to make myself more proud. (P01)

While Participant 11 said that

> Being a blessee has been very good because you get the things that you want, you can afford, many people does not always look down on me like they used to do before.

These views were supported by Participant 6 who said that:

> You can buy many things with that money and then you can have stable life.

Thus, participants seek financial stability and security through their blesser-blessee relationships. Although the money they received from their blessers and the things they

bought with the money were tangible resources, it made their daily lives more stable and stress-free; contributing to their emotional wellbeing.

Positive consequences ensued when the blessees began to enjoy themselves; such as living pleasant and enjoyable lives, and receiving what the blessees view as advantageous, good and noble actions such as support, being listened to, and other nonverbal affirmations such as affection and unexpected gifts (surprises), provided by the blesser. The blessees felt that they benefited from emotional support because they were cared for, communicated with, and were taken out on romantic dates. The blessings materialised when the blesser enabled the blessees to live better than they had been living before they met the blessers.

So, for me, my blesser has changed my life. (P11)

Travel

This is a reference to taking a quick journey, excursion, or outing, especially for fun. Participant 4 viewed it as a benefit from the blesser who took her along on expensive trips, to accompany the blesser to meetings, and to go on various tours. This is viewed as a positive consequence for the blessee. In addition, life style needs that drew participants to the blesser culture were fulfilled.

As a result of the blesser benefit of travelling, participants in the blesser culture were afforded the opportunity to meet influential people such as movie stars, soap-opera stars, famous musicians and other celebrities. The participants were driven around in expensive cars, which was also seen as a benefit to them as a result of getting involved in the blesser culture.

I can travel a lot and see a lot of places. (P04)

I would say it's nice because I'm going places I've never been before. I'm meeting celebrities, a lot of things. (P11)

These are considered to be the benefits because they are seen as positive consequences of becoming involved in blesser-blessee relationships.

Fulfil Expressed Needs

A benefit that emerged, and that may also overlap with other benefits, was that the participants clearly indicated that they got what they wanted.

> You get whatever you want…I get whatever I want every time I want. (P05)
>
> It's really good because I get what I want in time, if I need something... If I need something that is important in life, she can provide. (P07)
>
> I'm getting whatever I need, I've got everything for now. (P09)
>
> Yes, she is my blesser boss. She's the one she's helping me out, so I'm happy to with her. I don't know how it's going to last for how long, but for now. …I have advantages because I get everything I need from her. That is advantage, yes, 100 percent. (P09)
>
> It's wonderful. It's amazing. I get to get everything that I want from my blesser. They give me everything. (P010)
>
> You get to get everything that you want. You do not have a shortage of certain things because obviously you can get it from them. (P010)

Fulfilling expressed needs might be considered as a benefit.

Obtaining money and other resources as a result of a blesser-blessee relationship were all beneficial outcomes.

Theme 3: Drawbacks

Drawbacks are disadvantages or problems which the participants encountered due to their involvement in the blesser culture. This was of relevance to the purpose of the research because drawbacks could be used in campaigns as reasons for not becoming involved in the blesser culture.

The participants stated that they joined the blesser culture as a result of a lack of employment and educational opportunities, so that they could afford the things they want. They joined the blesser culture for financial gain, and a stable and secure lifestyle. These benefits came, however, with negative consequences such as regret, and harmful physical and/or emotional experiences.

Despite the drawbacks, the participants remained in the blesser-blessee relationships because of the benefits they gained. However, the negative consequences for staying in a blesser-blessee relationship were oftentimes exposure to bad behaviour and abusive actions by the blesser. Yet, the participants remained in these abusive relationships and endured the negative consequences because they wanted the benefits.

> But because of money, we stay. (P04)

There are several drawbacks and the following are the sub-codes in relation to the drawbacks of getting involved in the blesser culture as a blessee: negative health consequences; sexual exploitation; power dynamics; and emotional deterioration.

Negative Health Consequences

Negative health consequences are one drawback of becoming involved in the blesser culture. The physical health of a blessee might be at risk and the main health consequences mentioned by the participants were sexually transmitted diseases and potential unplanned pregnancies as a result of being involved in a blesser-blessee relationship.

According to the participants, sexual relationships with older men or women who were more experienced than them, put the blessees at risk of contracting STIs. Therefore, a blessee *might end up getting diseases* (P03) that are incurable. Thus, the participants expressed their concerns that a person could easily get sick when involved in the blesser culture because the blesser may force the blessee to have sex without the use of condoms.

> Because you do not know whether this person is sick or not, and you just obey, you do not know his health status and you do not know anything about him, it is just put me in danger. (P02)

The participants were of the view that one contributing factor to negative health consequences in the blesser culture was that they were unable to control the blessers. The blessers do what they want with who they want and, as a result, the blessers may be infected with STIs. A blesser may have sexual intercourse with multiple blessees, which also increases the likelihood of a sexually transmitted infection, or incurable disease.

> As we know, I can't know exactly where she is and what she's doing out there. Sometimes she's doing the same she does to me to other ten people or other hundred people. I'm not sure. So according to sickness, transmission disease, and all the stuff, so it's only the disadvantage of it. (P09)

The lack of, or refusal to, use a condom increases the risk of contracting STIs in blesser-blessee relationships.

> You can easily get sick because the person has more power over you, so he can force you to be intimate with him without protection. (P03)

Therefore, the participants regarded STIs as a possible disadvantage of getting involved in a blesser-blessee relationship. Additionally, participants testified that a blessee could not only get STIs and incurable diseases like HIV, but may also fall pregnant.

> You may get HIV, STI, and you may get unwanted pregnant. (P05)

This position is supported by participant (P08):

> You can get diseases such as STI, unplanned pregnancy.

The participants expressed their concerns around getting pregnant unintentionally due to being involved in blesser-blessee relationships.

> … and then many of them, they can leave you with unplanned pregnancy, then they leave you because they don't care about what you want or how you're going to be after they walk away. (P09)

During the interviews it became clear that the blessers were unlikely to reveal their health status to the participants and that they refused to use protection during sexual intercourse. Moreover, the blessers forced the participants to have sex with them without the use of condoms and they did not want the participants to use contraceptives for the prevention of pregnancy.

> I can be at risk sometimes because if I am talking about diseases, many blessers cannot tell you if they are well or not, if they have diseases or not. And then many of them, they can leave you with unplanned pregnancy. (P08)

This lack of negotiation with regard to the use of contraceptives was a contributing factor to negative health consequences because of being involved in a blesser-blessee relationship. According to the participants, it is important to use condoms and have protected sexual intercourse because it protects both blesser and blessee. However, as stated before, the blessers did not want to use condoms and refused to use any protection during sexual intercourse. There was no room for negotiation and the participants were unable to negotiate issues regarding contraceptives, condom usage and other protective measures such as abstinence, that may help in the prevention of STIs and unwanted pregnancies.

Physical Abuse

Some participants mentioned that they were beaten when they did not respond quickly to what the blesser wanted or when he/she called them. The participants accused the blessers of lying and having sexual relationships with other people (blessees). Yet, the participants justified the abuse they experienced because they were paid by the blessers. Almost as if they accepted it because there were benefits in return.

> I think he does inflict physical pains to me by beating me. Because sometimes he does anything that he wants and how he wants it. Yes, he does abuse me physically, because he's paying me, he just has to do what he wants. (P02)

P04 indicated that:

> we stay in a relationship where we get (physical) abused by our partners, but because of money, we stay and they beat us. (P04)

Power Dynamics

The negative impact of power dynamics was evident in issues such as jealousy, and the blesser being in control of the money and decision making. Physical abuse, as mentioned in the previous section, reflected power dynamics when the blessers beat the participants when they did not do the things the blessers wanted. In addition, the blessers reminded the participants that if it was not for them, the blessees would still be in poverty.

> We stay and they beat us…they can beat for the small mistakes and they can always remind you where you come from. Maybe they can even say, if it wasn't for me, it wouldn't be here. (P04)

When blessees try to negotiate, the blessers promise to find other blessees who will do everything they say.

> So, when it comes to blesser, when you are in this relationship, you do what he wants, so you do not negotiate because if you try to do that, he will say I will go find someone who will do things the way I want, so you do not negotiate because you will go find someone. (P02)

This could also prevent the blessees to go to school. Some participants testified that their blessers told them that they ought to go to parties, and not to school because the blesser wanted to spend some time with them. The participants did not like it.

> Sometimes my blesser forces me not to go to school. He can tell me that today we are going to parties. I'm not supposed to go to school, which is not a good idea, and I hate it. (P08)

Therefore, an act of being forced indicates the power dynamics within the blesser-blessee relationship.

According to the participants, blesser-blessee relationships were unfair in the sense that the blessers had wives, children and families of their own, while the participants had to remain loyal to the blessers. Some participants regarded their blessers as jealous people. When blessers saw their blessees with other young people, they became jealous. When the researcher asked Participant 11 about the disadvantages of being involved in the blesser culture, he responded that

> The disadvantages are like, my blesser is a very jealous person.

The jealousy tendencies were accompanied by controlling attributes which came about because of the fact that the blessers had money. Some participants expressed that their blessers were able to control them because those blessers had money as a resource.

> [The] blesser will just use his power over you. Because he has a lot of money. And you don't have nothing. I think he's going to control you just because of his power. (P03)

The participants testified that the blessers told them what to do, when to do and how to do it. This in return made the participants feel that they were being controlled.

> The disadvantages, like he or she can want to control you, tell you to do that, not to do that and that's not what you want. (P07)

Blesser-blessee relationships are not equal because, according to the participants, the important decisions were only made by the blessers. Furthermore, when the participants entered the blesser-blessee relationships they thought that it was a relationship with equal contributions in terms of viewpoints. Only to find out, as time went by, that it was not the case. The blessers took decisions and the relationships were based on the opinions of the blessers – not the blessees. Some participants felt that when the blessers told them to do this or to do that, it made them feel they were being controlled and it was not good for them since blessees ended up doing things that they did not want to do or never intended to do.

> When you get in your life of being a blessee, you thought maybe you are going to be equal with a blesser. No one is going to control someone who's going to control who like everything is going to be equal, like we're going to treat each other equal. Not to be controlled or not to be forced to do things that I don't want to do. Then when you have a blesser, he or she would want to control you, like tell you to do this, not to do that and it's not a good thing because you end up doing things that you don't want, you don't like. (P07)

Thus, according to the participants, they did not have much to say, or did not have a 'say' on many issues in their blesser-blessee relationships because the blessers felt they had ‘rights’ because they controlled the money.

> You don't have much say in majority of things. They get to have the bigger thing. So you don't have your own opinion. They control you. But you want to be independent,

but when you are in a relationship you don't really have that independence. You don't get that platform. (P10)

As a result, participants were experiencing some negative consequences of being controlled and denied independence as well as the lack of expressing their opinions on important issues in the blesser-blessee relationship.

Another power dynamic that reflected blessees being controlled by the blessers, was when the blessers prevented the blessees to make new friendships and from socialising with other friends. The blessers stopped the blessees having friendships with other young people because they felt insecure and jealous. As a result, it made the blessees feel that the blessers controlled their social lives.

He doesn't want me to have friends. (P03)

The participants testified that as a result of being controlling, blessers became overprotective.

She's overprotective. (P11)

The blessees allowed the controlling and overprotection by the blessers because they did not want to disobey their blessers by doing things that may cause the collapse of the blesser-blessee relationship.

Emotional Deterioration

Emotionally negative effects are a consequence of being involved in blesser-blessee relationships.

But if he takes his wife along it makes me feel left out, I ask myself that, am I also not important to him? (P02)

When a blesser left a blessee behind at home when travelling or when the blesser decided to travel with his wife, the participants felt unrecognised and unimportant. A negative consequence on the emotional wellbeing of the participants was the feeling of not being recognised, being unimportant and being inadequate.

Furthermore, the participants faced criticism and chastisement from members of the community. They were frequently stigmatised and called names, but they bear with it because they received the benefits they desired. For example, Participant P11 testified that:

> The community will regard you as a bad person but at the same time they don't know what I have gone through. So the people will always talk whether you are doing good or bad, so I don't really mind of what they are saying about me.

They were frequently asked by other members of the community and their families where they received their money. Participant 12, a participant, stated:

> When they ask you, where do you get the money, then, that's where it becomes a problem because I have to lie to them.

Both positive and negative emotional consequences were experienced by the participants. The positive consequences were discussed under Theme 2. However, positive emotions were experienced for a while but then negative emotions set in. Therefore, the participants had mixed feelings and emotions regarding life after becoming involved in the blesser culture. Although there were some benefits at times regarding emotional wellbeing and the blesser-blessee relationship, as stated by Participant 10:

> It's (being involved in the blesser culture) amazing. It's an amazing experience.

Most participants felt that becoming a blessee was, overall, not good for their emotional wellbeing.

> Some blessees don't enjoy being blessees. (P10)
>
> But on the other side, like, when I tell you that emotionally, he plays a negative role, like, he breaks my soul. (P01)

In the beginning of the blesser-blessee relationship, most of the participants were happy but gradually became unhappy and dissatisfied.

> At the beginning, I was happy. I started being so unhappy, which was very wrong. (P08)

Participants believed that the peers of their generation went through a lot due to the blesser culture because it is not an easy life.

I know this kind of life; I know it's not easy. And boys at my age or girls at my age, they really go through a lot. They go through a tough time. (P07)

They also got depressed due to negative emotional consequences in the blesser-blessee relationships.

But also I was depressed. (P01)

Participant 05 summarised it as follows:

Well, my life is quite miserable, but I'll just hang in there.

Everything tends to be something I regret with.

It's a strange experience. Because you end up not knowing who you are, where you come from.

The participants indicated that some young people were afraid of being judged by people in the community for being involved in the blesser culture. Some of the people were willing to judge young people without necessarily knowing the situation and circumstances that led young people to be involved in blesser-blessee relationships.

Well, some think maybe is wrong or they are afraid to be judged by people, because there are people who likes to judge a person but they don’t know the reasons why he ends up doing that thing. So, some of them they just afraid but I don’t think it’s not a good thing. Being a blessee is a good thing but it depends on what reasons. (P07)

The participants felt that the bad feeling came about as a result of being labelled and given bad names by community members. The community disliked the person who got involved in the blesser-blessee community.

I think it's a bad thing because you have a bad name from people, and you'll be disliked (by members of the community). (P05)

And that's going to hurt you deep down for the rest of your life because it's not what you want. (P05)

Summary

Three themes emerged from the current study: risk factors, benefits and drawbacks.

Risk factors included the need for money, the home situation, peer pressure and an awareness of the blesser culture. Poverty was the main issue facing the participants, and their primary motivation for joining the blesser culture was financial gain. The participants emphasised money over education because they believed that money was important, and joining the blesser culture was a simple way to make money.

Additionally, the participants voiced their worries about the harsh treatment they endured at home from family members, claiming that their parents' authoritarian and stringent discipline methods resulted them turning to the blessers for solace.

Another risk factor for engaging with the blesser culture was identified as peer pressure as some of the participants' friends encouraged them to engage in the blesser culture. Some participants stated that they encountered their blessers at shopping centres and on the streets, indicating that not all blessees were under peer pressure. Thus, without anyone exposing them to blesser-blessee relationships, they choose the blesser culture.

According to this study, benefits derived from the blesser culture were seen as positive consequences, and the participants actively pursued benefits when they participated in the blesser culture. These benefits included factors such as accumulating wealth and material possessions, having the resources to further their education, maintaining their emotional health that could have been negatively affected by their domestic situations, and having the opportunity to travel.

The financial benefits that the participants gained helped them to meet their educational needs, which included paying for tuition, school supplies, living expenses, pocket money, food, and other school-related expenses. Because they experienced positive emotional wellbeing, several participants have entered into relationships with blessers. The blessers offered them consolation, solace, support, and empathy.

On the other hand, some participants gained the benefit of local as well as international travel. As a result, blessees travelled and enjoyed exploring new locations that they had never been to before meeting their blessers.

The highlighted drawbacks were the detrimental effects to their health, physical abuse, power dynamics, and emotional deterioration. The drawbacks were the unfavourable effects of being involved with a blesser. The lives of these participants were challenged by a variety of these drawbacks.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Theme 1: Risk Factors

Need for Money

According to the current study, having financial difficulties increases one's likelihood of engaging with the blesser culture. This is a result of the person being compelled by a financial need to get money by engaging in the blesser culture.

Research has shown (for example, Zawu, 2022;Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018) that many young people enter blesser-blessee relationships for financial and material benefit. According to Doyisa (2019), there are young women in South Africa who engage in sexual relationships with older partners who are wealthy in order to be provided with money and valuable things. The practise is a type of transactional sex in which older rich men (blessers) exchange money and valuable material objects in exchange for sex from women (blessees).

The biggest difficulty confronting the young people of Mamelodi Township is poverty, and thus their motivation for becoming part of the blesser culture is to obtain money. For the young people of Mamelodi Township the thought of having money causes them to prioritise money over school, and getting engaged in the blesser culture is an easy method to earn money. Furthermore, the influence of poverty causes youth to seek money for themselves rather than relying on their parents to provide for them. Thobejane et al. (2017) support this viewpoint, claiming that young people in many countries are exploited or attempt to exploit such relationships in order to meet their basic needs, upscale their standard of living and standing among peers, and/or obtain money, clothes, school fees, gifts, and various favours in exchange for sexual relationships. In this research, it was found that not having enough money to meet necessities was substantially connected with the blesser culture, similar to findings from previous research (Zawu, 2022; Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019; Palfreman, 2020; Mampane, 2018). The decision of a young person to enter into such a relationship may be motivated by a variety of factors that vary depending on the setting. Money is still regarded as the primary motivator for such relationships; however, it may take on other meanings

depending on the precise nature of the demand for money or other rewards. Because of their low socioeconomic status, some young girls may be unable to meet their basic needs or assist their family. Other women may claim money for non-essential items that enable them to live a preferred lifestyle and conform to the image of a sophisticated lady, such as clothes, jewellery, cell phones, or trendy hairstyles (Hoss & Blokland, 2018).

Youth in Mamelodi Township argue that the country's economy is performing poorly and that this is severely affecting them since they lack jobs that allow them to provide for themselves. As a result of the country's economic catastrophe, the youth have turned to the blesser culture. Parents of teenagers who are involved in blesser-blessee relationships are unable to provide their children with the lifestyle and luxury items that they require. Young people frequently require financial assistance for school and other fundamental necessities. However, given the various types of work performed by those who provide, there is a disparity in the ability of some families to provide adequately for their children. Unemployment is another important element that contributes to the financial restraints that families and young women experience (Mbere, 2017). In Mamelodi Township, youth see involvement in the blesser culture as a way of earning money on a monthly basis. Young people who are still in school see being active in the blesser culture as a means of making money. Although Mamba and Shongwe (2022) refer to intergenerational sexual partnerships among Eswatini undergraduates, their findings are similar to those of the blesser culture. They state that risk factors for intergenerational sexual partners include poverty or low socioeconomic status, having parents with a lower education level, friendships with older adolescents or peer pressure, their place of residence, food insecurity, alcohol use, feeling secure, being a student, marital status, powerlessness, increased libido, curiosity, attitudes towards assertive women, culture and religion, receiving money or gifts from a partner, age at sexual maturity, and age at sexual maturity.

Furthermore, young people in Mamelodi Township participate in the blesser culture to earn money for school fees and other school-related expenses. In all of these forms of partnerships girls barter sexual services for products and/or money such as food,

underwear, clothes, soap, cream, pocket money, rent payment, school fees and/or textbooks. Economic survival includes being pressured (actively or passively) by parents to get necessary household commodities. Improving one's long-term life chances typically entails receiving school expenses from one's partner or enlisting the assistance of a partner in order to ‘climb’ the economic ladder (which can also raise one's standing among one’s peers). School children in Africa, for example, frequently engage in sex with older sugar daddies to help pay school fees, and the fact that many sugar daddies may have numerous partners or engage in risky sex does not appear to be a barrier. Most of those young people's discourses make it evident that they do not participate in sexual relationships with older males for sexual pleasure, especially for girls (Thobejane et al., 2017). According to Mbere (2017), research shows that young women also use sex to establish a long-term sustainable livelihood. This entails exploiting sex to obtain jobs and tuition at schools or higher education institutions.

Home Situation

Mbere (2017) claims that the presence of a father as a provider as well as a disciplinarian could aid in preventing transactional sex. In the context of the blesser culture, both roles of provider and disciplinarian may be crucial. This is because blessees in Mamelodi Township reported that discipline enforcement made them prone to join the blesser culture. According to the Services (2003) research on family interactions, adolescent girls respond positively to parental support and punishment, while adolescent boys may respond negatively. As a result, a negative pattern of behaviour and treatment of children exists that was once known as ‘child discipline’ but is now known as ‘child abuse’.

Moreover, according to Hoss and Blokland (2018) in literature pertaining to sugar daddies and blessers, the girls described emotional violence, primarily in the form of bullying or peer pressure at school, physical violence at home and at school, sexual harassment, primarily from older boys, and sexual abuse at home and at school. These variables create the setting for the blesser culture phenomena to take place easily.

However, some participants stated that family members make it easy for them to perform schoolwork and that family members play the most important role in their lives by supporting them in their schoolwork, ambitions, and dreams. Additionally, there are those participants who do not have the support of their family members for school-related expenses such as tuition, housing, and food. Mbere (2017) agrees, stating that young people use transactional sex to acquire accommodation and food because they do not have family support to meet their needs. Sexual connections between older individuals and younger men and women appear to be on the rise in South Africa. Youth are prone to blesser inducements when they lack substantial support from within or outside the family. Young people who are emotionally deprived, mistreated, and accustomed to abuse are an easy target for getting involved in the blesser culture since blesser-blessee relationships provide some form of validation of their worth (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016).

Thus, while families of the adolescents in Mamelodi Township may not be able to meet their children's needs, they may still play an essential role in encouraging them to attend to school and do everything they can to accomplish their God-given abilities and goals.

Peer Pressure

In their study titled *The factors contributing to blesser-blessee relationship among female students*, Thobejane et al. (2017) state that young girls must choose their friends wisely because of the essential role of friendships in encouraging others to get associated with blessers in order to ‘belong’. They further investigated peer pressure as another factor influencing sexual behaviour and motives for engaging in sexual relationships with blessers or older individuals. Girls aspire to be ‘in fashion’ by conforming to the standards of their classmates in order to fit in. This is due to the fact that a female may not be deemed ‘cool’ if she does not wear the trendy shoes, clothes, or makeup that her classmates. Furthermore, they justify these choices by stating that due to peer pressure they have a desire to fit in, which can result in them making choices that they would not normally make just to impress

their friends. As a result, some end up having sexual relations with older men just to fit in, and having a blesser appears to be an easier way to achieve that.

According to this study, peer pressure to participate in blesser-blessee relationships is a risk factor for youths in Mamelodi Township. Peer pressure manifested itself in this study in several ways. One was that participants were encouraged to participate in the blesser culture by their peers. Another was that participants were not directly encouraged to participate in the blesser culture, but they desired the flamboyant lifestyle that their friends were living and were influenced to participate in blesser-blessee relationships. Some young individuals agree to blesser-blessee relationships to impress their friends and to avoid being regarded as old-fashioned and foolish.

Various studies (for example, Thobejane et al., 2017; Mampane, 2018; Zawu, 2022; Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018) have shown that peer pressure is a factor that contributes to participation in the blesser culture and other sexual transactional activities. According to Mampane (2018), research on the African continent and abroad has proved that peer pressure plays a major role in the general life and sexual lives of adolescents and young people. Mampane (2018) also found that peer pressure played a role in the susceptibility of young women to transactional sex and HIV infection.

Furthermore, studies have revealed that in Sub-Saharan Africa, peer pressure is the primary motivator for young women who engage in transactional sex because they want to be treated the same as their peers (Doyisa, 2019).

Awareness of the Blesser Culture

When reflecting on the university rural female students, Thobejane et al. (2017) claim that numerous young woman state that they were introduced into blesser culture relationships by other adolescents, and to have sex with the blesser for the first time. Because status of a young girl within this group is often contingent on her having fine clothes and other material possessions. Having the blessers also enhances the blessee’s reputation among their peers.

Friends refer many young individuals in Mamelodi to the blessers. Their close friends initiate them into the culture. The young people are persuaded that they should engage in blesser-blessee relationships in order to live the luxurious lifestyles that their friends do. Youth adore the kinds and types of lives that their peers in blesser-blessee relationships lead, and as a result, they join the blesser culture.

According to Jonas (2019), the transition from childhood to adulthood is a significant one that brings with it responsibility, growth, and the realisation of a new existence. Most teenagers take risks with their lives during this period because they believe they understand themselves. Young women grow conscious that they are equal to the next girl who is equally well dressed, but not to the man who provided her with material items. Inequality and poverty encourage people to make dangerous decisions, which lead to risky actions.

Some blessees are not made aware of the blesser culture by anyone, but recognised and made themselves aware of the power of the sex in the transactional arrangements. Many of the young people in this study said that they had not been introduced to the blesser culture by anybody other than themselves. They ran into their blessers in shopping malls, on the streets, on social media, or by approaching them. As a result, some young people voluntarily participate in the blesser culture and encourage others to do the same. Many adolescent children are becoming aware of the blesser culture through online social media platforms such as WhatsApp messenger, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others. According to the Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA (2018), young people must be shielded from the potentially detrimental influence of social media. Children and teenagers must understand how to use smart phones and social media platforms responsibly, as well as be alert of online risks. Jonas (2019) agrees with this point of view. Literature focuses on female adolescence, but with the awareness that males also engage in prostitution, sex work, ‘sugar daddy’ culture, and even the ‘blesser’ phenomenon. Research also examines the youth culture that makes use of social media, which introduces and establishes instant access to information, which appears to imbue the youth with a sense of power. Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA (2018)

defines how social media, as a component of youth culture, plays a prominent role in the development of the ‘blesser’ phenomena.

Theme 2: Benefits

Benefits acquired from the blesser culture are viewed as positive consequences in this study, and the youth in Mamelodi Township seek benefits when becoming active in the blesser culture. They engage in a blesser-blessee relationship purely for financial gain. Money, fancy branded clothes, cell phones, cars, and nice meals are all examples of benefits. Hoss and Blokland (2018) stated that the decision to enter into blesser culture relationships may be based on a variety of factors that vary depending on the context. In addition, money is still regarded as the primary motivator for such relationships; however, it may take on other meanings depending on the precise reason for the demand for money or other rewards.

In this study, the participants joined blesser-blessee relationships for financial gain. Young people from Mamelodi Township may benefit in a variety of ways. Numerous research studies (for example, Thobejane et al., 2017; Mampane, 2018; Zawu, 2022; Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018) have identified financial incentives as the primary motivator for younger men and women to engage in sexual relationships with older partners. Emotional wellbeing, money, travel, educational assistance, survival, material accumulation, and addressing declared wants are some ways to benefit from the blesser culture. These advantages are classified into the following basic categories: assistance with economic survival; a method of securing longer-term chances such as education, work, or business opportunities; and a means of achieving superior prestige among peers (Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018). Some Mamelodi Township youth participate in the blesser culture in order to foster an environment in which they can profit from developing their educational objectives, dreams, and goals. If this is realised when they join the culture, these aspirations in themselves could become risk factors for the next generation of youth that join the culture.

Monetary Benefits

Youth of Mamelodi Township participate in the blesser culture in order to attain tangible benefits. Even though the rewards are positive consequences of becoming involved in the blesser culture, it is also a risk factor for becoming involved in the blesser culture. These tangible resources could be money and/or costly goods like vehicles, clothes, overseas trips, and cell phones. Many works of literature including Zawu (2022) concur when it comes to the rewards that the blessees acquire and achieve. According to Varjavandi (2017), one of the stereotypical gifts connected with the 'blesser' phenomena is abroad shopping tours. Palfreman (2020) supported this assessment when studying transactional sex and intergenerational relationships in urban South Africa, stating that when asked about their reasons for getting into a blesser relationship, their responses were entirely related to gaining financial capital in the form of money and expensive goods such as expensive clothes, phones, and weave hairstyles. Futhermore, blessees pursue various types of economic gain, of which capital is the most apparent, consisting of money, consistent income, and assets (Power, 1999, as cited in Palfreman, 2020).

Education

The monetary benefits generated by the blessees in Mamelodi Township assist them in meeting their scholastic needs, such as paying school fees, residential accommodation, pocket money, tuition costs, purchasing food, and other school-related activities. According to numerous researchers (for example, Thobejane et al., 2017; Mampane, 2018; Zawu, 2022; Youth Research Unit (YRU) Bureau of Market Research UNISA, 2018), most young girls are considered vulnerable individuals who find themselves in unfavourable situations, with little chance of obtaining an education and establishing a self-sustaining middleclass lifestyle. Palfreman (2020) backs up this assertion by stating that young women and girls are negotiating blesser-blessee partnerships and using males in order to gain financial security and better education for themselves. They might even be advancing their own interests in terms of education, career, and present or future goals (Leclerc-Madlala, 2004; Hoss & Blokland, 2018).

Furthermore, according to Oyediran et al. (2011, as cited in Montana, 2020), young women engage in age-disparate relationships with older men for a variety of reasons, including finances to support educational expenditure.

Thus, in addition to monetary assistance, blessers can further the scholastic aspirations of their blessees. They can encourage adolescents to concentrate on their schoolwork rather than on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and others (Jonas, 2019). This study is relevant because of the influence that the blesser phenomena has on the thoughts and behaviour of both male and female adolescents, as well as the emotional, physical, psychological and health changes that it may bring about. Adolescents, like any other person, seek value in their lives, which could include material possessions that will provide them with everything they need.

Emotional Wellbeing

As much as blesser-blessee relationships may be unstable and have negative side effects, they also have some good consequences for emotions. In the current study, the positive effects of emotional wellbeing emerged as happiness, joy, calm, enthusiasm, and exuberating.

The power of sexuality may be both joyful and destructive. Sexuality may be viewed as an expression of fondness when interacting with other people, which include tenderness, attention, and self-confidence, or yearning, callous coldness, and abuse (Thatcher, 2011, as cited in Jonas, 2019). The blesser phenomena resembles a powerful and one-of-a-kind sequence of interactive, passionate, and corporeal contacts and opportunities that communicate a very profound meaning of sexuality (Jonas, 2019).

The benefits and accumulation of goods increase blessees' self-esteem and confidence. Thus, Palfreman (2020) argues that while weighing the apparent dangers against the rewards blessees choose to get involved in the blesser culture, irrespective. Non-tangible benefits such as increased self-esteem and self-confidence from being perceived to be living a lavish lifestyle and receiving notoriety, for example, through social media, can also be included as rewards.

Therefore, blessees in Mamelodi Township rely on their blessers for stability and financial security. This stability and financial security provides the blessees with more stability and stress-free living, making them feel good because they are no longer financially burdened.

Travel

Travelling appears to be an important benefit for blessees (Thobejane et al., 2017). This study shows that travel is regarded as a positive benefit for becoming involved in the blesser culture. Blessees are likely to meet persons they admire and recognise from television when travelling. Blessees in Mamelodi Township like meeting celebrities such as movie stars, musicians, and soap opera stars, and these are the memories they cherish and treasure. Thobejane et al. (2017) note in their study on the factors influencing blesser-blessee relationships among female students that there are different levels of blessers and they serve distinct functions.

> In South Africa, blessers are classified into four levels: level one will provide you with airtime and data, level two will provide you with clothing and Brazilian hair, level three will provide you with iPhones and property, and level four will provide you with flashy cars, trips to Dubai, and even business opportunities. It is no surprise that sugar daddies, who typically only provide pocket money, groceries, and airtime, are no match for blessers. (p. 8728)

Thobejane et al. (2017) further add to their evaluation by claiming that young girls are no longer looking for love but are seeking material gain. They further add that young girls are constantly thinking about what they can gain, including trips. As a result, the number of young females involved in blesser-blessee relationships is considerable.

Thus, overseas shopping vacations are one of the stereotypical gifts that have become associated with the blesser phenomena (Varjavandi, 2017). According to Doyisa (2019), youth are also under pressure because they want to appear relevant, wear luxurious hair, travel to expensive destinations, and eat at beautiful restaurants.

Theme 3: Drawbacks

There are many drawbacks that the blessees in Mamelodi Township have expressed. The drawbacks of being involved with a blesser were explored in Chapter 5 including the negative consequences experienced, such as, physical abuse, power dynamics and emotional deterioration.

Negative Health Consequences

Getting involved in the blesser culture could have negative health consequences, which include unintentional pregnancies and being infected with sexually transmitted infections. Many blessers are probably not telling their blessees about their health. They may also not share their HIV/AIDS status with the blessees.

According to Thobejane et al. (2017), blessers appear to be a solid source of cash that most ladies do not want to lose, while sexual pleasure appears to be less essential. Women have a restricted power to negotiate safe sex with their partners because they are terrified of losing their wealthy partners if they do. Furthermore, because these women are young, age creates a barrier for them to address critical matters such as condom usage and the use of contraception with their partners, because they are older (Doyisa, 2019).

According to Hsia et al. (2021), transactional sex frequently coexists with risky sexual behaviours such as early sexual debut and inconsistent condom use. As a result, there is substantial evidence linking transactional sex to negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and gender-based violence. This viewpoint is reinforced by Moodley and Ebrahim (2019), who believe that the desire of defenceless, immature female adolescents to consider a self-determined monetary sexual connection exposes the majority of them to the risk of HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted illnesses, as well as the possibility of pregnancy. Furthermore, the risk is increased because many blessers do not wear condoms every time they have sex. According to Palfreman (2020), young women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the burden of sexual and reproductive health; are more vulnerable to acquiring STIs than males; are less likely to be able to negotiate safe sex than males; and suffer far more negative consequences of early and unintended pregnancy. In South Africa,

the female-to-male HIV infection ratio is 2.4, and black African women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of HIV prevalence. Furthermore, blessers dislike blessees who negotiate condom use or utilise contraception during sex (Mensah et al., 2022; Scull, 2022; Mampane, 2018). As a result, there are numerous opportunities for blessees to become infected with sexually transmitted illnesses and unintended pregnancies. Blesser-blessee relationships, according to Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2016), increase vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse, as well as the risk of unexpected pregnancies and sexually transmitted illnesses. They also note that the young people's connection with the blessers results in an unexpected pregnancy and likely deprives them of the ability to realise their academic potential, leaving them dependent and vulnerable. Girls and young women are put at risk of exploitation and domination by older, wealthier males in these transactional sexual relationships (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016).

Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health from 2014 to 2019, instituted a three-year programme to shield schoolgirls from having connections with blessers. His goal was to prevent new HIV/AIDS infections and teen pregnancy. The programme was designed to educate girls and safeguard them from the exploitation of bad men. Because of the prevalence of sexually transmitted viruses such as HIV/AIDS and even pregnancy among female adolescents, sexual disclosure during puberty is distressing because ‘sex topic’ and discussions are viewed as taboo in many families. The dominance of men who have several partners exposes young girls to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and possibly early pregnancies (Jonas, 2019)

Physical Abuse

Numerous researchers (for example, Mensah et al., 2022; Mampane, 2018; Moodley & Ebrahim, 2019; Thobejane et al., 2017) stress the role of physical violence as a drawback in the blesser-blessee relationship, while other researchers focus on the on the role of sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and psychological abuse in blesser-blessee relationships. According to Doyisa (2019), physical violence and rape are common among vulnerable women, particularly those involved in transactional sex. Mensah et al. (2022) support this

viewpoint, claiming that on the issue of gender-based violence, mostly exhibited as sexual exploitation and physical abuse, the majority of females stated that they were not favourably predisposed to violence against women. Whereas some females described how they have been abused by their blessers when they ‘misbehaved’.

Blessees in Mamelodi Township stay in physically abusive blesser-blessee relationships because they do not want to lose the benefits that they are being given by the blessers. They endure physical abuse by their blessers because they are afraid that they are going to lose the relationship they have with their blesser and they are afraid that their blessers are going to leave them and find another blessees. This spills over into other aspects of the relationship, such as blessees being hesitant to negotiate the use of condoms and contraception for fear of losing their blessers.

Power Dynamics

Blessees have a sexual resource, which provide them with a certain degree of power. On the other hand, the blessers have financial resources, which weigh heavily in favour of a blesser-blessee relationship. Depending on who wants whose resources the most, one individual may have more power than the other. Unfortunately, the consequences for the blessees' emotional wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, and physical health may be severe because they are the ones who need financial resources the most.

Blessers, because of the high demand for them, have options; they can choose a blessee that appeals to them; and the number of blessers is limited. Blessers may have greater power than blessees as a result of this dynamic.

The phenomenon of blessers was identified as occurring in a complicated social environment and having a significant impact on the wellbeing of specifically females. An examination of their accounts reveals that the girls' role in their interactions with older males cannot be limited to that of a victim who is utterly weak, nor to that of a social agent who is completely in control, regardless of the unequal power dynamics. The power dynamics in blesser-blessee relationships have certain negative implications that may have long-term consequences. Despite this, multiple studies have found that risky sexual behaviour is

directly related to power relations in sexual contacts between older males and younger women (Hoss & Blokland, 2018).

The blessers in Mamelodi Township have the authority to do whatever they desire, even forcing the blessee to have unprotected sex with them. Blessers have money, and when blessees complain about the horrible things they are doing, blessers assure them that they have money and will find another blessee who will do things the way they want them done. According to Doyisa (2019), the gift of significant sums of money gives the blessers authority, making it difficult to negotiate safer sexual practises. She goes on to say that the difficulties linked with blesser-blessee relationships include STI and HIV risk factors, low academic achievement, and power and aggression issues. This control propensity is widespread among Mamelodi Township's blessers. In blesser partnerships, blessees are unable to communicate their ideas. The blessers discourage the blessees from socialising with their peers and establishing new acquaintances because the blessers fear that they would have sexual encounters with their friends and others with whom they are interacting. However, blessers in Mamelodi Township claim that they are doing this to protect them, but blessees in Mamelodi Township do not enjoy this behaviour since they believe that their blessers are controlling and ‘overprotecting’ them. The study revealed certain difficulties, such as power dynamics, control, and aggression in blesser-blessee relationships. Because blessers are wealthy, they have the capacity to control and assault the young women with whom they are sexually involved, taking advantage of the fact that these women are desperate and financially dependent on them.

Furthermore, other blessees argue that the blesser-blessee relationship is unjust because the blessers have spouses, children, and households of their own, while the blessees do not. Regardless of the circumstances, blessees are supposed to be devoted to and faithful to their blessers. Blessers were found to have more power than blessees, because they have more money. Blessers have used their influence to exploit these young women because they know they are desperate. They were found to be dominating and abusing these young women (Doyisa, 2019).

According to Mensah et al. (2022), female youngsters in Nigeria complained about the excessive impact of some of their sugar daddies on their lives. They claimed that some of them were envious and possessive, as if they were in a marriage relationship with them. There was movement limitation, which excluded individuals from social groups and severed ties with male friends and family members. As a result, participants forfeited their freedom in order to comply with the wishes of their 'sponsors'.

Furthermore, there is a point of dispute in a blesser-blessee connection regarding who takes critical decisions that must be made in the blesser-blessee relationship. According to numerous studies, the blessers make the critical decisions in blesser-blessee interactions, not the blessees. According to Ngubane (2010, as cited in Mokhatle et al., 2021), there is a high rate of oppression and unequal decision making in sexual relationships. Before joining the blesser culture, many young people in Mamelodi Township assumed that both blessers and blessees would be treated equally by each other. However, this is not the case; there is no equality in terms of making critical decisions in the blesser-blessee relationship in Mamelodi Township's blesser culture.

Thus, power dynamics in blesser-blessee relationships in Mamelodi Township is viewed as a detrimental consequence of participating in the blesser culture. Power dynamics can take several forms depending on the type and nature of the blesser-blessee relationship.

Emotional Deterioration

According to the current study, those who have been involved in the blesser culture in Mamelodi Township have reported experiencing a decline in their emotional wellbeing. The negative consequences of engaging in the blesser culture are linked to a sense of emotional decline. Emotional degeneration might include unease, discouragement, and heartache brought on by engaging in the blesser culture.

When assessing transactional sex amongst university students in Ghana, Amo-Adjei et al. (2014) state that while love is often an integral part of intimate partnerships, the question of love in transactional sexual relationships is nuanced with complexities, and it is often not entirely clear whether the relationships are founded on love or emotional

attachment. They also noted that female students shielded themselves from emotional involvement, despite the fact that they frequently perceived their partners as caring; viewing the supply of gifts as a show of devotion and, in some cases, a replacement for parental love. Thus, blessees view their blessers as caring, loving and devoted to their emotional wellness, but, the blessees are not willing to show devotion to the blesser-blessee relationships because they may be subjected to emotional consequences such as disappointment, humiliation, depression and/or distress. Moreover, the negative emotional consequences of the blessees are amplified by Mamelodi Township community members who continuously ridicule them for their involvement with blessers. Thobejane et al. (2017) reinforce this viewpoint by stating that as strange as it may sound, the ‘sugar daddy’ connection does highlight the transactional character of the relationship, which in many societies may be defined as prostitution. Similarly, Mazvarirwofa (2014 as cited in Thobejane at al., 2017) found that most people connect having a relationship with sugar daddies with being a prostitute, while females who engage in such relationships believe it is not the case. These accusations may make the blessees feel embarrassment and shame. The blessees emphasise that blessers are merely being compensated for the money they give out as a gift to the blessees – not being paid for a service rendered, as in a prostitute-client relationship. The criticism spreads to the family, where family members question the blessees about how they obtained the pricey gifts. By merely being asked by their family members about the origin of the expensive gifts, blessees feel bad and guilty about possessing the expensive goods. Stoebenau et al. (2016) support this viewpoint by stating that research has emphasised how community members hold women who practice transactional sex for the consumption of modern goods, at least in part, responsible for generalised moral decline, viewing them as both superficial and dangerous. As a result, females feel condemned and judged; they feel inadequate and are perceived as gold-diggers.

Summary

Blessees get involved in the blesser culture for benefits. However, they are encouraged to be involved in the culture due to the risk factors. The risk factors are the

home situation, peer pressure, need for money and other pushing factors. There are both drawbacks in the involvement in the blesser culture which the blessees encounter, and benefits.

The positive consequences include travelling, paying for educational activities, encouragement, and emotional support. The negative consequences include physical abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, and contracting sexually transmitted infection.

In essence, the discussion of the study's findings in relation to existing literature confirmed that the risk factors of youths in Mamelodi Township to become involved in the blesser culture are not necessarily different from what were previously found. What might be different is the mix of risk factors that has the most impact and how these risk factors manifest.

Chapter 7: Summary

The research problem driving this study was that more information is required about the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture in informal settlements in South Africa. The radio, television, YouTube, Google, Tabloids, and other media platforms, through dramatic representations, may not be able to make advertisements that are aimed at stopping the prevalence of the blesser culture (Stoebenau et al., 2016; Thobejane et al., 2017). The aim of this study was to identify and explore the risk factors relating to the blesser culture – specifically with reference to the youth from the informal settlement in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane District Municipality of South Africa. The main research question which was answered through this study is, *what are the risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture in Mamelodi Township in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in the Republic of South Africa?*

The current study's findings address the research questions by elucidating the risk factors associated with involvement in the blesser culture. The study identified several risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture in Mamelodi Township. The factors that emerged included a need for money, the home-situation, peer pressure and awareness of the blesser culture.

The findings of the current study addressed the sub-questions as well, because, in order to answer the main question, the sub-questions were answered:

- What influence does the blesser (s) have on the blessee's life?

The research showed both positive and negative influences. Blessers have the ability to positively influence the blessees by supporting and encouraging them in their education, and emotional wellbeing during the time when the blessees were not feeling well. While the blessers' negative influences come in the form of encouraging the blessees to leave school, to use drugs and cigarettes, and to drink alcohol.

- How was the blessee's life before becoming a blessee?

Prior to becoming a part of the blesser culture, the blessees' lives were fraught with poverty; they could not afford to pay for their education fees, they were lacking expensive items, could not afford to travel, and their expressed needs were unmet.

- How was blessee's life after becoming a blessee?

There were good and bad experiences for the blessees after getting involved in the blesser culture; needs were met but with negative consequences. After joining the blesser culture, their lives improved because they could pay for their school fees expenses, had money, could accumulate expensive items, could afford travelling, and their expressed needs were fulfilled. Positive consequences emerged in this research, indicating that there were benefits to becoming blessees which improved their lives. On the other hand, negative consequences included health consequences, negative emotional consequences and physical consequences, which negatively impacted on their lives.

- What are the advantages of being a blessee?

The advantages of being a blessee relate to the benefits theme and include Monetary benefits; educational support; emotional support; travelling; and other expressed needs being met.

- What are the disadvantages of being a blessee?

These disadvantages include negative health consequences; physical abuse; power dynamics; emotional deterioration, which reflect the drawbacks theme of the study.

Theoretical Framework Contribution

The Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems theory (Perron, 2018; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) provided the theoretical framework around which the interviews were constructed. The findings address the four factors of person, context, process, and time (see Table 1) that forms part of the system theory.

This research examined the 'person' factor, which included characteristics of gender, age, and competencies all playing a part; this is because, the researcher considered the age, gender, and competencies of the participants when selecting them for interviews.

The exosystem and the microsystem were the contexts that had the largest impact on the results of this research. This is due to the fact that a person's surroundings, situation, conditions, settings, scenarios, and circumstances (exosystem) have a greater impact on their decision to engage in the blesser culture than just the individual (microsystem). However, the influence of an individual's engagement in the blesser culture is not just determined by their circumstances; rather, it is also influenced by the overall state of the economy in the Republic of South Africa.

The ‘process factor’ is where the ‘person’ and ‘context’ factors meet. This describes the environment that the individual was in and how it influenced their decision to become involved in the blesser culture (Perron, 2018). The points at which the person and the context factor interact are, for instance, (a) peer pressure that encourages participation in the blesser culture; (b) the need for money; (c) the home situation; and (d) awareness of the blesser culture.

The ‘time factor’ is the duration of life events and the socio-historical context. According to the current study, blessees’ participation in the blesser culture is influenced by the time in which they are currently living. Participants live in a time where peer pressure view being a blessee as ‘cool’; or one is labelled as ‘old fashion’ when one refrain from becoming a part of the blesser culture; or in the company of those who believe that accumulating wealth and money deserves consideration before all other significant aspects of life. Benefits like accumulating wealth and material possessions, receiving help for their schooling, feeling emotionally, mentally and physically healthy, travelling, and having their needs met are examples of the social circumstances that influence life events in Mamelodi Township.

The Strength of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture within the context of informal settlements in South Africa. As a result of employing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, the researcher was able to explore in-depth and identify risk factors for this research, and understand the perspectives of the

participants because they were presenting their stories from the perspective of their lived experiences.

The hermeneutic approach followed in this study allowed the researcher to receive information from first-hand lived experiences and gain an understanding of the blesser-blessee relationships from the perspectives of the blessees in Mamelodi Township.

Further, the researcher was able to recruit more men participants than expected because there is a reality perception in numerous research studies that many people who participate in transactional sex in a blesser culture are female and not male, and that the blessers are only middle-aged rich males, with no mention of women as blessers. Furthermore, there is a widespread belief in many societies regarding men, patriarchy, and masculinity that men do not cry and that boys do not divulge their deepest secrets. However, in this study, boys spoke with the researcher about their first-hand lived experiences in the blesser culture, blesser-blessee relationships, intergenerational sex, and transactional sex.

The current study was informed by various theoretical perspectives. However, Bronfenbrenner's theory formed the theoretical framework – and not a combination of theories on the blesser culture; the researcher reviewed the social exchange theory, sexual economic theory, and theory of planned behaviour – all of which had been used by other scholars in their own research on the blesser culture.

This study explored the essence and complexities of blesser-blessee relationships in Mamelodi Township. The main focus was risk factors, with a particular emphasis on the aim of exploring, in-depth, and identifying the risk factors that may encourage young people to become involved in the blesser culture. The risk factors are made plainly apparent even though the current study depicted how young people perceive and justify their involvement in the blesser culture. Thus, the consequences of getting involved in the blesser culture could either be a risk factor for future youths becoming involved in the culture (positive consequences) or something that could push them away from the culture (using negative consequences in campaigns).

The Limitations of the Study

Regarding the Bronfenbrenner Ecological systems theory, the interviews used in this study lacked in the ‘context factor’ where it came to the characteristics of the macro- and chrono-systems.

The scope of this investigation was limited by the exclusion criteria stated in Chapters 1 and 3. The fact that the data was only obtained from participants aged between 18 and 22 was restrictive because there were many additional blessees active in the blesser culture at various stages that may have shared different perspectives from those provided by the age group selected. The requirement that the study was limited to Mamelodi Township and no other regions was restrictive since other dynamics may have existed that were very different from those observed in Mamelodi Township.

Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the limited scope of the research, there are various areas that require further investigation. To begin with, there is a need to go beyond Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory framework for studying blesser-blessee relationships by delving into various paradigms of blesser culture that go outside the spectrum of poverty, independence, and efficiency. This will increase our understanding of the sexuality of individuals in Township environments; the motivations for engaging in sex for money exchange partnerships; and the complexities of blesser-blessee intimate relationships in Mamelodi Township. This is a limitation that the current study did not adequately highlight which may be explored further in future research. Moreover, future research may additionally examine the ‘time factor’, with a focus on socio-historical contexts and the amount of time that has passed since life events.

Additionally, the experiences recorded in this study are exclusive to young people residing in Mamelodi Township. As a result, the approach and theoretical frameworks employed in this study must be applied to collect the narratives of young people in various parts of South African townships. This will disclose experiences that are specific to those situations and will contribute to a broader knowledge of the sexuality of young people living in townships; beyond the stereotypes of township youth being limited, impoverished and helpless victims. Furthermore, broadening the scope of this study may offer information to

support comparison analysis, broadening our comprehension of the blesser culture, while at the same time giving young people involved in blesser-blessee relationships an opportunity for participation and responsibility. To date, the documenting of blesser experiences has not been researched or presented from the standpoint of the blesser culture, which is something future researchers may focus on.

For academics interested in studying the blesser culture, it may be necessary to look at the blesser culture in suburban areas rather than the township community. This is because there is a widespread misconception that only people from rural, inner-city, and township areas are active in the blesser culture. Furthermore, the researcher is of the opinion that the blesser culture is a social, economic, and occasionally spiritual issue. These issues can affect anyone at any moment, whether they live in a rural area, a township, inner-city, or in the suburbs.

Because the ecological systems theory recognises the importance of person, context, process, and time, the detailing of the perspectives of the blesser should be examined using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as framework. These factors and characteristics may best include blessers' actual lived experiences, making it suited for investigating blessers' involvement in blesser-blessee relationships. By investigating personal portrayals of blessers in blesser-blessee relationships, both interventions and research may be able to go beyond depictions of young people as victims of older rich men.

Summary

In this chapter there was discussion and exploration of the research aim, which was to investigate in-depth the risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture within the context of informal settlement in the Republic of South Africa. These risk factors were thoroughly discussed in the 'discussed in Chapter 6' and included the need for money, the home situation, peer pressure, and awareness of the blesser culture.

The sub-questions were also answered by the other themes which emerged as discussed in Chapter 5. The themes which answered the sub-questions were: benefits and

drawbacks. The theoretical framework contribution, the strength of this study, the limitations of this study, and the suggestion for future research were also examined.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Introductory question

How is it to be a young person in this day and time in Mamelodi Township, in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality?

Involvement in blessee culture

You volunteered to participate in this study because you are a blessee. Please tell me more about this experience.

The researcher will not unnecessarily interrupt the participant and allow the participant's story to unfold naturally. However, probing will be done for the purpose of clarification. The researcher will also check if information related to the questions below has been covered. If not, the researcher will specifically ask these questions:

- How did you become involved in the blesser culture?
- What influence does your blesser (s) have on your life?
- How was your life before becoming a blessee?
- How was/is your life after becoming a blessee?
- Who plays the biggest role in your life? (Probe about blesser and/or family involvement if not mentioned by the participant)
- What are the advantages of being a blessee?
- What are the disadvantages of being a blessee?
- Many people regard the blesser culture as a form of prostitution, what is your view on this?
- How is being a blessee different from being involved in prostitution?
- What do the blessees regard as risk factors for becoming a blessee?
- What do you regard as risk factors for becoming a blessee?
- What is your view about campaigns against the blesser culture?
- Why do you think youths become blessees?

- How do you experience being a youth in Mamelodi Township?
- How do you experience being a blessee?

Throughout the interview, the researcher will keep the theoretical framework in mind and use the factors as pointers for probing and clarification.

Factors	**Characteristics**
Person	Age, gender, competencies
Context	Microsystem, exosystem, mesosystem, macro-system and chrono-system
Process	Intersection between person and context factors
Time	Socio-historical conditions and time since life events

Appendix B

Letter of Approval From Tateni Community Care Service

Association Incorporated Under Section 21 (97 17226/08)

P.O. BOX 77980 MAMELODI WEST 0101
227 VAMBANDA STREET
MORETELE VIEW, PRETORIA
SOUTH AFRICA

NPO REGISTRATION No: 031 – 196
PBO Section 18A no 930 026 373

Website: www.tateni.org.za

E-mail: director@tateni.org

Telephone: +27 (0)12 805 2752
+27 (0)12 805 9409

TATENI
Community Care Services

04 August 2021

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

This is to confirm that Mr Tshifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu is granted permission to conduct a research for his Master's in Psychology studies at Tateni Community Care Services.

As stated in the letter dated 25 July 2021, Tateni Community Care Services should remain anonymous.

N.B: Tateni Community Care Services shall not be liable for any damage, loss or liability whatsoever nature arising from the use of our premises.

Tateni Community Care Services employees shall not be liable for any direct, indirect, incidental or damages of any kind whatsoever in any way due to, resulting from or arising in connection with the research study.

Tateni Community Care Services will not take any financial responsibility that may occur during the research study.

Should you need further information, please contact the undersigned.

M.M.G. PHALA

Executive Director

Tateni Community Care Services

Directors: Ms. M.M.G. Phala (Executive) • Mr. P.M. Choma (Chairman)
Ms. V.H. Ramulle • Ms. S.J. Evans • Ms. P.M. Mkhimkar • Mr. G. Balgyi • Mr. V.H. Buhen • Ms. T. Selebogo
Founder & Patron: Mrs. G.T. Bhora

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in the Study

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Research title:

Researcher: Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu (36013633)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____(participant full name and surname), confirm that Mr. Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation in the current study.

I have also read the information sheet and understand 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 semi-structured interviews that will be used to gather information and that the researcher may keep field-notes during the interview.

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

Participant Name & Surname……..

Participant Signature……..Date……

Researcher's Name & Surname: Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu

Researcher's signature……..Date……

Appendix D

College of Human Sciences Ethics Approval

UNISA university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

25 July 2022

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
36013633 _CREC_CHS_2022

Dear Mr Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 25 July 2022 to 25 July 2025

Researcher(s): Name: Mr Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu
Contact details: 36013633 @mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr. H.C. Erasmus
Contact details: 012 4292823

Title: Risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture

Degree Purpose: MA

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The ***medium risk application was reviewed by*** College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, 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 Ethics Review Committee.
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.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

Appendix E

Participant Information Sheet

Research title: Risk factors for becoming a blesser in the blesser culture

Researcher: Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu (36013633)

Ethics clearance reference number: 36013633_CREC_CHS_2022

31/01/2022

Title: Risk factors for becoming a blesser in the blesser culture

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu and I am doing research towards a Master of Arts in Psychology, at the University of South Africa (Unisa). My supervisor is Dr Helena Erasmus, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology. I have funding from UNISA for this study. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled *Risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture*.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to better understand why people become blessees in a blesser/blessee relationship during their adolescent years.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in this study if you became a blessee in a blesser/blessee relationship during your adolescent years, regardless of your current involvement in a blesser/blessee relationship. My aim is to interview at least eight participants.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your role on this study is to share your experiences about being involved in the blesser culture, as well as the advantages and challenges of being a blessee, during an interview that I will conduct with you. The interview should take 60 to 90 minutes.

The information you provide during the interview will be recorded by way of writing notes on a book and by audio recording. This is done only for further analysis and for recording purposes so that it should serve as a reminder when I am writing the dissertation. However, it is significant for you to know that all the information you are going to provide will be treated with the confidentiality it deserves. Please note that you do not have to disclose information to me if you do not feel comfortable to do so.

The study involves audio/video taping and semi-structured interviews.

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

Participation 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?

You might benefit from participating in the study by being able to share your deepest story in a safe space. In addition, you might give other youth an opportunity not to become involved in the blesser culture. Another benefit is that you will contribute towards a better understanding of the blesser culture which might be useful to traditional leaders, policing forums, principals and educators, civic organizations, non-governmental organizations and society at large. This information may also be of much use to researchers and policy makers.

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

A foreseeable risk to participating in the study is psychological discomfort. You will have access to a debriefing session directly after the interview in an attempt to prevent psychological discomfort. In the case of psychological discomfort occurring as a result of your participation in the study, personnel at Tateni Community Care Service will be available to assist you.

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

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and to no one, apart from the researcher and members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

The content of the interview will only be shared with Dr Erasmus who acts as my supervisor. The data will be shared via computer but will be password protected. The devices that hold the data shall be stored in a place, to which only the researcher and the supervisor will have access.

The results of the study, which may include anonymous data, might also be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings.

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

Electronic copies of the interviews and the transcriptions thereof will be stored on a password protected computer for a minimum period of five years for future research or academic purposes. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. When necessary, these electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software program.

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

No monetary rewards are linked to participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

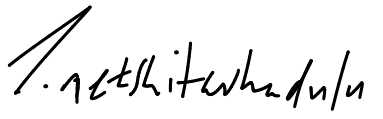
HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

You will be provided with an electronic copy of or a link to the dissertation and any other publications that may be produced as a result of this research. If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu (36013633@mylife.unisa.ac.za).

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please send me an email to 36013633@mylife.unisa.ac.za. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr Helena Erasmus (012 4292823 or erasmhc@unisa.ac.za). Contact the research ethics chairperson Ilse ferns (fernsi@unisa.ac.za) if you have any ethical concerns.

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

Thank you.



Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu

Appendix F

Confidentiality Agreement With Research Third Parties

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WITH RESEARCH THIRD PARTIES

Hereby, I _____(name and surname) with ID number _____, in my personal capacity as research assistant collaborating with Mr. Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu on a research titled **Risk factors for becoming a blesser in the blesser culture,** acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the conditions of ethical clearance specific to this study. I shall conform to and abide by these conditions. Furthermore, I am aware of the sensitivity of the information collected and the need for strict controls to ensure confidentiality obligations associated with the study.

I agree to the privacy and confidentiality of the information that I am granted access to in my duties as a research assistant. I will not disclose nor sell the information that I have been granted permission to gain access to in good faith, to anyone.

I also confirm that I have been briefed by the research team on the protocols and expectations of my behaviour and involvement in the research as a research assistant.

SIGNED: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G

Request for Permission to Conduct the Study

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

PERMISSION LETTER

Research title: "Risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture"

Researcher: Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu

(36013633)

Request for permission to conduct research at Tateni Community Care Service:

"Risk factors for becoming a blessee in the blesser culture"

31 January 2022

Dr Helena Erasmus

Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Winnie Madikizela Mandela Building

Room 5 - 110

(012 4292823 or erasmhc@unisa.ac.za).

Dear Director M Phala

I, Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu, am doing a master's research (MA in Psychology) under the supervision of Dr Helena Erasmus who is a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I have obtained funding from UNISA to conduct the study. The purpose of this letter is to request permission from Tateni Community Care Service to conduct the study within its structures, and to allow its social

workers, social auxiliary workers and/or psychologists to assist participants should they have adverse reactions in response to their participation in the study.

Your company has been selected as the source for participants because you are working with vulnerable youth who were previously involved in the blesser culture and youth who are actively participating in this activity.

The aim of the study is to explore the life experiences of blessees to identify possible risk factors that lead them to become involved in blesser relationships. The research problem is that little is known about the risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture in the informal settlement in Mamelodi Township.

The study will entail face-to-face, semi-structured interviews that will be audio recorded. The procedures regarding COVID-19 will be followed. Therefore, sanitizers will be provided, social distancing will be ensured, and the wearing of mask shall be compulsory during the interviews. Should Unisa's Covid-19 guidelines prevent me to conduct face-to-face interviews, telephonic interviews will be conducted.

The benefits of this study are that the results could inform policy making related to the blesser culture, and contribute to creating awareness about risk factors for becoming involved in the blesser culture. Different stakeholders such as traditional leaders, policy makers, other NGOs, the Government and schools could benefit from this study by gaining information that could inform strategies, plans, imbizos (this is a gathering called by a chief or a king, wanting to discuss or address important agenda, especially important social issues which are directly affecting their subjects), forums, awareness campaigns and movements against blesser culture in the Mamelodi Township and similar communities.

A potential risk of participating in the study includes psychological effects especially where participants suffered physical violence, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, rape or other tormenting experiences as a blessee. During the interviews I will do all in my ability to avoid adverse effects and be observant should the participants display discomfort. For each participant an arrangement will be made with a Tateni social worker, auxiliary social worker or psychologist to have a debriefing session with the participant.

Feedback on the study will be provided through sharing copies of the dissertation with Tateni Community Care Service, as well as with the participants.

Tateni Community Care Service as the location for this research study will not be anonymized, and the anonymity of the participants will be ensured.

Yours sincerely

Signature……

Thifhelimbilu Netshitavhadulu

M.A Student