

Running head: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS IN A CAPE TOWN SUBURB

Exploring the lived experiences of homelessness in a Cape Town suburb.

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ABSTRACT

Homelessness is a global issue. In South Africa, between 100 000 and 200 000 people are homeless. People living without shelter and limited access to food and ablution facilities are arguably the most destitute in any given country. In South Africa, despite shelters and interventions, the number of people living on the streets continues to rise. Existing research on homelessness is primarily quantitative, focusing on conceptualising its size and definition. This type of research is important as it aims to outline the roles of key stakeholders in helping people off the streets. However, as community psychology theory states, in order to ensure the relevance and sustainability of these interventions, it is necessary to gain insight from those who have experienced homelessness first hand. Through a theoretical framework of community psychology, this research project used a qualitative, participatory action research (PAR) methodology called Photovoice to explore the lived experiences of homelessness through the descriptions of those who had lived on the street. Four men who were previously homeless took part. Data was interpreted using thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts and participants' photo stories. Emerging themes centred around participants' interpretations of the causes of homelessness, difficulties of living on the streets, challenges with exiting the street and experiences of living in the shelter. The themes provide insight into the complex nature of homelessness and how many factors interplayed in these participants' lives, leading to them becoming homeless. A secondary analysis provides discourse around the impact of the research process on the participants' lives in terms of empowerment and social capital. Future research recommendations include exploring multilevels of intervention, from the individual to the society in order to both to prevent people from ending up on the street and to effectively help

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people off the street.

Keywords: Homelessness; Photovoice; community psychology; participation; South Africa; social capital; empowerment; critical consciousness

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Background and Introduction

Homelessness is a problem experienced worldwide, regardless of a country's economic status (Carter & May, 200; Roets et al., 2016). In South Africa, an estimated 100 000 to 200 000 people are living on the streets (Cross, Seager, Erasmus, Ward, & O'Donovan, 2010). With harsh weather conditions, no access to ablution facilities and no income, people living this way are arguably the most destitute in the country (Cross et al., 2010). The number of people living on the streets continues to increase (Kok, Cross & Roux, 2010). Comprehensive surveys taken in Limpopo, Gauteng and Mpumalanga revealed that in 1996, 0.02% of the population (682 people) were homeless. In the space of 5 years this statistic increased by tenfold, with 0.22% (6833 people) living on the streets in 2001 (Kok et al., 2010). In the City of Cape Town, 0,2% of the population (7383 people) are conservatively estimated to be homeless today (Bernardo, 2015). Reasons for the increase in homelessness have been attributed to the increase in rates of unemployment in the country (Kingdon & Knight, 2004), and immigration to South Africa due to political unrest or unemployment in neighbouring countries (Roets et al., 2016).

According to a recent synthesis of the research on homelessness in South Africa, the focus has been on outlining the scale of it in order to outline roles for key stakeholders (Roets et al., 2016). Although this research is important, very little has been conducted with the participation of those who have lived on the streets (Roets et al., 2016). There is now a need for in depth qualitative enquiry aimed at understanding the nature of homelessness, from those who have experienced it first-hand (Roets et al., 2016). This information is vital for interventions if they wish to be relevant to those they aim to help (Olufemi, 2002).

Review and Rationale

Identifying the Problem

The above mentioned statistics bring into focus the vast number of people who are living in inhumane circumstances (Cross et al., 2010). Unfortunately, research shows that few of these people are accessing help. A survey of three of South Africa's provinces revealed that 9% of people who are homeless utilised shelters, whilst 65% chose to stay on the streets or in a park (Kok et al., 2010). In order to both prevent people becoming homeless and help the already homeless off the streets, information is needed on what causes people in South Africa to become

homeless, and once there, what makes it difficult for them to leave again and prevent them from utilising programs available to them such as shelters (Cross & Seager, 2010; Kok et al., 2010).

In this chapter, South African and international research on homelessness is reviewed by first outlining a definition and demographic of homelessness, examining the suggested causes of, and barriers of exiting homelessness, and viewing qualitative research in the field.

Definition and Demographics

There is no agreed upon definition of homelessness (Kok et al., 2010; Naidoo, 2010). Some research papers classify those living in inadequate shelters, such as shack settlements, as homeless, whilst others delineate the term to relate exclusively to those with no roof over their heads (Roets et al., 2016). For the purpose and scope of this research project, the term homelessness will refer to the latter group.

Between 2005 and 2008, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) conducted a multidisciplinary study on the demographics of homelessness in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. The survey found that the most common age for becoming homeless was between late adolescence and early adulthood (Cross & Seager, 2010). Adults and children seemed to be from different populations; adults usually came from rural areas, whilst youth were often born in the cities (Cross & Seager, 2010). Homelessness was more frequent in urban than rural areas. In terms of gender, 87% of people on the street in urban areas were male (Cross & Seager, 2010). Grade seven was found to be the average level of education (Mathebula & Ross 2013). Having an understanding of these demographics can inform interventions and researchers of what the most likely demographic risk factors are for becoming homeless. Once the target populations are known, an understanding of the causes of homelessness is needed so correct intervention strategies can be used.

Causes of Homelessness

Knowing the underlying causes of homelessness is crucial to making prevention and helping strategies of homeless interventions relevant (Cross & Seager, 2010). South African research lists financial problems as a causal factor (Roets et al., 2016), currently the unemployment rate is at 27.1% (StatsSA, 2016). Without income from employment, people cannot afford food or housing, causing them to become homeless (Naidoo, 2010; Roets et al., 2016).

South Africa's apartheid era is also said to contribute to the current state of homelessness, due to the Group Areas Act (Cross & Seager, 2010). During apartheid, the white minority were given land in the fertile and wealthier areas, including the Central Business Districts (CBDs), whilst people of other ethnicities were forcibly relocated to poorer areas, away from the CBD and outside of employment opportunities (Mabin, 1992). The effects of these relocations have been longstanding, where entire communities have been relocated far from income opportunities (Cross & Seager, 2010). For work, people from these areas travel daily into the wealthier areas surrounding Cape Town. Transport is expensive, hence, many people sleep on the street in the city rather than traveling back home every day (Cross & Seager, 2010). Furthermore, due to the high unemployment rate mentioned above, many of those traveling to the cities to seek work do not find jobs and end up staying on the street (Naidoo, 2010).

Another cause of homelessness is broken homes (Mathebula & Ross, 2013). Children often leave the home due to long term physical or sexual abuse, neglect from a parent or addiction in the home (Mathebula & Ross, 2013). Drug or alcohol addiction in the individual, also causes homelessness when substance abuse takes over a person's life, causing them to lose their job and end up on the streets (Kidd & Davidson, 2007).

Hindrances from Moving Back into a Home

Once on the streets, there are many barriers preventing people from coming off again (Olufemi, 2002). Interventions need to be aware of these barriers if they are to help people overcome them. Economically there is little in place to help people off the street (Naidoo, 2010). Government funding for housing is focused on those living in informal settlements (Cross & Seager, 2010; Naidoo, 2010). Of the small amount of governmental money going towards helping the homeless, most is allocated to shelters (Cross & Seager, 2010). As mentioned previously, only 9% of those living on the streets utilise these services (Kok et al., 2010). One possible reason for the low utilisation of shelters is lack of knowledge that these services are available (Mathebula & Ross, 2013).

Qualitative Research

Unfortunately, knowing the common causes of and barriers to exiting homelessness only helps interventions to an extent. For example, knowing that addiction is a cause does not answer why the addiction began in the first place. There is a paucity of South African qualitative research investigating the experiences of homelessness (Roets et al., 2016). Olufemi, (2002) is one of the few, his findings showed that stigmatization is a barrier to leaving. The public misunderstand and therefore ignore the needs of those who are homeless, causing them to adopt an identity of helplessness and loss of self-worth (Olufemi, 2002). Qualitative research internationally gives deeper insight into this issue of stigma and identity and addiction (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Thompson, Pollio, Eyrich, Bradbury & North, 2004). These studies show that people living on the streets often feel they deserve their situation, which hinders them from trying to leave (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Findings revealed a culture and mind-set of homelessness, whereby exiting would mean changing identity and adapting back into a world which had formerly failed them. Once on the street substance abuse is reported to create a barrier for people trying to exit (Thompson et al., 2004). People on the streets often report being trapped by their addiction (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Thompson et al., 2004). Thompson and colleagues., (2004) found that often a pivotal event, such as nearly dying from overdose, created the change which drove people out of the homeless mind-set and caused them to look for a way off the streets.

The above mentioned qualitative studies give insight into experiences of living on the streets. The findings show that interventions need to be sensitive to how difficult the change is from coming off the streets into the shelter.

Unfortunately, the research is international and therefore, the results cannot be generalised to the Cape Town context (Olufemi, 2002). Furthermore, answers to why certain causes exist and why interventions aren't utilised are needed. In order to create effective and lasting interventions, researchers need to gain insights from them and include them as a part of the team addressing the problem (Campbell, 2004).

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this research is to gain insight into the lived experiences of homelessness in Cape Town. The insights gained should provide valuable information for key stakeholders and policy makers around how to make programs most effective at helping people off the streets. Participatory action research (PAR) methodology was used with the aim of achieving three things. Firstly, through the research process, participants embark on a process of critical consciousness, realising their own agency in sharing their experiences of homelessness and gaining some control over their situation (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007). Secondly, the project will raise awareness amongst community leaders, residents and others in positions to implement change, and thirdly, a thematic analysis of the data produced will reveal important information to key stakeholders about the lived experiences of homelessness, hopefully helping programs to become more relevant to those they wish to help.

Main Research Question:

How do people who have lived on the streets represent their experiences of homelessness?

Sub Questions:

How do the participants interpret the causes of homelessness in their lives?

How do the participants interpret the barriers and challenges they have faced in attempting to exit homelessness?

How do participants describe the difficulties which come with living on the streets and the difference that living in a shelter has made?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research project is located within the Community Psychology paradigm. Community Psychology focuses on creating social transformation by using a bottom-up process, whereby the individuals who are most affected become the driving force toward creating change in their communities (Campbell & Murray, 2004). The process happens through the community first finding ways to create change within themselves, and then secondly by voicing their needs to policy makers about what additional change is necessary (Campbell,

2004). In this photovoice project, three key elements of community psychology are focused on, namely: critical consciousness, social capital and empowerment.

Critical consciousness is a concept introduced by social theorist Paulo Freire (Campbell & Murray, 2004). Freire argued that the most effective way for change to take place within the individual was for them to be simultaneously working to change the environment and the community around them (Campbell & Murray, 2004). The practical outworking of this concept would be to make a community aware of the causes of their oppression and the process that is needed in order for them to overcome their situation.

In order for a community to begin to create change for themselves, they will need to rely on and possibly enhance their social capital. Social capital is understood as the strengths and resources a community will have within themselves (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007). This strength may be in the form of camaraderie within the community, as well as knowledge and experience that those outside of the community may possess. For example, networks and alliances with stakeholders outside the community.

Lastly, a process of empowerment can be born from the combination of developing critical consciousness and the building up of social capital within a community. Empowerment is understood as a twofold process, whereby there is a change in state of mind to viewing oneself as worthy of esteem, and a change in the allocation of power whereby communities who were formerly oppressed are given opportunity and resources in order to create change (Campbell, 2004).

The community psychology framework is suitable for investigating homelessness for a number of reasons. People living on the streets are possibly one of the most impoverished (Cross et al, 2010) and stigmatised (Olufemi, 2002) groups in South Africa. Firstly, participation will give those on the streets an opportunity to develop critical consciousness through the focus group discussions and to re-present themselves in their photographs, hence reducing this stigma and helping empower them into changing their own situations (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007).

A final note on the theoretical framework is to say that primarily, community psychology aims to benefit the participants in the research project. In other words, the process and outcome should be first and foremost useful to the community, and secondly useful to the development of

knowledge (Speak & Tipple, 2006). In light of this aim a secondary analysis in the results section evaluates the effectiveness of the research process in developing critical consciousness, social capital and empowerment.

Methodology

Photovoice Research

Community psychology uses community based participatory research (CBPR) to facilitate participation from those in the community (Campbell & Murray, 2004). Photovoice is one such CBPR method and it was chosen because the aims of photovoice coincide well with the three key elements focused on within the theoretical framework, critical consciousness, social capital and empowerment. Photovoice methodology begins with semi-structured focus group discussions around the problems affecting the community, creating a space for critical discourse by using semi-structured focus groups (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Participants are then able to voice their problems and strengths and tell their story through the use of cameras (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Lastly, photovoice methodology aims to bring awareness to those in power such as policy makers by displaying the photographs at an exhibition and giving the participants an opportunity to share their experiences. Raising awareness builds social capital in the community (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Furthermore, it is the participants who create this awareness through their images, hence along the lines of Freire's concept of critical consciousness, the participants are the ones who begin to change their community which in turn helps them in the process of changing themselves. The process in turn empowers the participants as their influence on the community shows that they are worthy of esteem and able to make a difference.

Photovoice Intervention

The researcher partnered with an organisation in a Cape Town Suburb called Observatory Improvement District (OBSID). OBSID is in the process of further developing their program which aids those living on the street in Observatory. Currently the program takes people on the street into a six-month job shadowing program. The people are paid a stipend for their work and given accommodation at a shelter. This research project acted as a needs analysis for the program. The aim was to confirm what is known about how best to aid those on the streets, as well as gain new insights into what could be done to improve interventions like OBSID's and

make them more relevant. Furthermore, through the exhibition, the aim was to create awareness to businesses and residents in the community as to how best to assist people living on the streets (Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004)

Sampling Strategy

The research is qualitative and therefore does not purport to generalise the data to the broader population, but rather to gain in depth insight into the specific experiences of those living on the streets. Hence, purposive sampling was used, whereby participants were specifically chosen according to their availability and suitability for the study. OBSID selected people who were participating in their program and who had previously lived on the streets. OBSID's Social Auxiliary worker supervised and attended the focus groups.

At the beginning of the research process, three participants were selected by OBSID; Simon, Matthew, and Keith. Simon is a white male in his early thirties. He did not live in the shelter with the other men, and participated in OBSID's job shadowing program on a part time basis as another contact had given him work opportunities elsewhere. Simon had grown up in a middle class home in a Cape Town suburb. He is qualified as a restaurant manager.

Keith is a middle aged black male who grew up in a Cape Town township formed by apartheid forced removals. He entered into the research program whilst he was still in the early stages of the OBSID job shadowing process. By the end of the research process he had moved up into working in the office and is completing training courses in order to become a security guard. Keith had been homeless for three years. Matthew is a white male in his late 50s. Before living on the streets he lived with his late wife in a low class community on Cape Town's outskirts.

Simon exited the study after the first focus group, due to time constraints. Another participant, Roberto, was added to the photovoice project just before Simon left. Roberto is a coloured male between his late 20s and early 30s from a Cape Town suburb. He grew up in a low socioeconomic status family with domestic violence in the home, and left at the age of seventeen. To integrate Roberto into the research process, he was asked the same first focus group questions in interview format.

OBSID's social auxiliary worker sat in on the focus groups and at times added insights from his experience of working with people living on the streets.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data was collected in the form of transcripts from the interview and focus groups, as well as the photographs taken by the participants, accompanied by their descriptions. As was mentioned above, research began with a focus group involving the first three participants, OBSID's social auxiliary worker, the researcher's supervisor who acted as the research assistant, and the researcher. The researcher had a few questions with which to guide the direction of the discussion; 1) What do you define homelessness as? 2) How did you end up becoming homeless? 3) What do you think some of the other causes of homelessness could be? 4) What made it difficult for you to get off the streets again? 5) What else do you think makes it difficult for people to leave the streets?

After the first focus group, the participants were given a workshop on photography techniques and shown a short film about another Photovoice project. They were then loaned cameras for two weeks. After the two weeks the photographs were viewed and the men described them. Participants requested more time with the cameras, which was granted. Two weeks later, another meeting was held where the men chose the photographs they felt were most relevant to their experiences on the street. Thereafter, they contextualised their stories around these images. During the meeting we discussed how they would like to exhibit their photographs and who they wanted to invite to the event. We met twice more in order to practice the presentations of the photographs for the exhibition. People from the participants' shelter, the Observatory community, OBSID's members, as well as friends and academics from UCT attended the exhibition. Each participant presented their photographs on a PowerPoint slideshow and told the audience their accompanying stories. The same photographs with descriptions attached were exhibited at the venue where people could see them in more detail and ask one on one questions with the participants. Lastly, a final focus group was held to discuss the men's experiences of the research process. The following questions were asked: 1) How did you feel about participating in the project? What did you enjoy and what didn't you enjoy? 2) Did the process change anything about the way you think about your life and your future plans? 3) What did it feel like to have people interested in and listening to your story? And 4) Do you think people seeing your photographs and stories is important and, if so, why?

Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher's own biases and who they are as an individual will play a role in the knowledge produced (Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity a process whereby the researcher manages these biases by acknowledging and outlining how their presence may have influenced the research. (Berger, 2015). In this study, the difference between myself and the participants possibly influenced what was shared in discussions and photographs. I am a relatively young white female coming from a middle class background with no understanding of what it is like to live on the streets. These participants are all men, all significantly older than I am, and have all experienced the difficulties of broken homes, poverty, and surviving on the street. In the first focus group I became acutely aware of my naivety in this context and feared that my position would affect how much the men were willing to share. Fortunately, the men were quite open and willing to share their stories. The degree of their openness was further confirmed when after the first focus group, the OBSID social worker who counsels the participants on a regular basis said that it was the first time he was hearing many of the stories brought forward by the men in the focus group discussion. I also realised that even if my presence as the researcher may have influenced the knowledge that was produced, without facilitating the space for these types of discussions and research processes to take place, the men's stories may not have been heard.

I am also aware that, as the researcher, I chose which quotes and photographs to discuss in my data analysis, and that another researcher may have selected differently depending on their own biases. In managing this bias, during the thematic analysis process, I aimed to find themes by the frequency in which they emerged, rather than from what I assumed to be the most relevant findings. Furthermore, the men chose which photographs they wanted to use for the exhibition, and only from that selected pool of photographs came those chosen to discuss in the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for conducting the research was granted by The University of Cape Town Psychology Department Ethics Committee. The following ethical considerations were given due attention.

Informed Consent

In light of upholding participants' rights to autonomy, the researcher is obligated to inform participants about the purpose and process of the research before they consent to participate (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). In this venture, consent forms (see Appendix) were given to each participant, explained in detail and time was given for questions to be asked. The forms gave an outline of the approximate time needed for participation, the possible costs and benefits associated with participation, and how confidentiality would be ensured. The researcher asked for signed permission to use the photographs as well as the discussions from the focus groups. However, in all publications and written work about the research, pseudonyms were used so that the participants could remain anonymous. If the researcher needed to use the participants' names at any stage, consent for this would be renegotiated.

Consent was renegotiated at each phase of the research process, especially for the recording of discussions. The participants were made aware that they could request that the recorder be stopped at any time and that they could leave the research at any stage.

Confidentiality within the group

Due to the discussions taking place in a group, the researcher could not control if confidentiality of the discussions was breached by other participants. Hence, the group was encouraged to maintain confidentiality, but also reminded of the possibility of what they shared being taken outside the group by other participants.

Risks and Benefits

This process of sharing their life experiences had the potential to bring up difficult memories and emotions for the participants. At the start of the project, participants were informed of the different places available to them for counselling and the researcher was ready to refer a participant if the need arose. Fortunately, as the focus groups were constructed of open ended questions, the participants were able to choose what and how much of their lives to share which diminished the risk.

Carrying a camera incurred the potential risk of the participants being robbed. The researcher informed the participants of this risk and informed them of ways to diminish it.

Ethical issues relating to Secondary Participants

Secondary participants are people who the participant might photograph in their photostory. Participants were told to obtain verbal consent from them or, in the case of minors, from their parents or guardians before photographing them. If secondary participants' faces were identifiable, they were obscured in any written or published works. Furthermore, no photographs of minors or of people displayed in a way which could compromise their dignity or safety were used in any written work or publication.

Data Analysis

The data in the form of focus groups and photostories was analysed using the thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process entails identifying common trends or patterns within the dataset, which become themes (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). It is from these themes that conclusions can be made about the findings. The themes should relate back to answering the research questions posed (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Thematic analysis is useful for exploratory research, as the method allows the researcher to span the data for broad themes as opposed to searching for predetermined ideas from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As understood in CBPR methodology, the participants are in fact the experts in the research topic, hence, in the process of analysing the research, it is imperative that the researcher approaches the data with no predetermined agenda of their own. Therefore, using an explorative, open ended tool of analysis is most appropriate. Furthermore, thematic analysis enables the researcher to analyse the data and compare themes across different types of datasets. The process is known as triangulation, which is also useful for checking validity across different types of data (Denzin, 2012). In the research project, the data used took on the form of focus group and interview transcripts, the photostories, and finally the observations noted by the researcher in a thesis journal. If another type of analysis, (such as discourse or narrative analysis) was used, the data collection would be limited to data where words were used, hence leaving out the photographs, which were valuable part of the dataset.

Findings and Discussion

Thematic Analysis

Causes.

The themes which emerged from the data gave an indication of how complicated the process of becoming homelessness is. For each participant, an interplay of causal factors led them to end up on the street, and again an interplay of factors which made it difficult to leave the streets again. Hence, it could be said that homelessness was caused and perpetuated by a cycle of entrapment in which many different factors interacted. These factors spanned across the different levels of society; from the individual, to the family system, the community and the greater society as a whole.

The Community psychology framework is a suitable lens through which to conduct this research because the theory views a person's behaviour, not only from the individual level, but from the perspective of the system in which the person is living (Campbell & Murray, 2004). The value of this viewpoint is that researchers can find interventions to address multiple levels of causation from helping the individual to finding ways that the broader community can change to prevent people from ending up on the streets.

First I discuss the themes which were linked to how the men ended up on the street. These were: broken families, societal problems; addiction; and lastly, financial difficulties. The themes coincided with findings by Olufemi, (2002) who listed poverty, unemployment, broken families, physical abuse, and violence as factors which made people more at risk of ending up on the streets.

Broken families.

As mentioned in this paper's review prior research found family problems to be a predominant cause of homelessness. From this data, broken families was the most common theme which emerged. All four participants described their families playing an influential role in them becoming homeless. The theme emerged in many different forms and thus is sub categorised into the following categories; death of a family member, neglect, domestic abuse and substance abuse in the family.

Death of a family member.

Three of the four participants brought up this theme. The loss of someone seemed to change the family dynamic which caused ripple effects. Simon lost his father when he was young, and his older brother became his example. His brother abused drugs and Simon followed this, becoming addicted as well. Simon describes this in the following quote.

ok um when I was okay 11 years old my father died, so I looked up to my brother as the next role model, and he became a drug dealer when he was 15 and I was 13 and he offered me drugs so... 19 years of using drugs, I found myself sleeping in my car, um eventually selling my car to end up all around cape town. (Simon)

For Matthew, the illness and eventual death of his wife played a causal role in him becoming homeless. His wife became terminally ill and needed constant nursing. The couple could not afford this necessity. Matthew chose to quit his job in order to nurse his wife.

*Old Life.*

This photo is a reminder of what I once had. I had it for many many years. When my wife got seriously ill, to the point that she became bed ridden, my salary could not afford private nursing care. I had to make a choice between my work and my wife. The car we were driving was a Honda Ballade, we had to sell it to afford medication and doctor's bills. (Matthew)

Hostile environments in the home.

All the participants explained that for various reasons, they could no longer live with their families. In Matthew's case, his in-laws asked him to leave once his wife had passed away.

after her passing her family... Especially her brother, came to me after the funeral, "Matthew this isn't your house, it's time to move on now", knowing very well, I've got nowhere to go to, so I left everything behind and uh, I left. (Matthew)

Keith reported having a very difficult relationship with his mother, explaining how on some nights she forced him to sleep outside.

it's like she threw me out, I used to sleep under the stairs (these were outside) and she knew I was working, but she still throws me out. (Keith)

He explained that he preferred living on the streets to being with her, despite also reporting living on the streets as being very harsh.

but that was a big mistake (Keith talking about moving back into the house) it was worse there than here, so rather I go back to the streets, because it was better here. (Keith)

Roberto grew up watching his father abuse his mother. His father was also involved in the gangs. His upbringing in this environment led to him seeking comfort and social support within the gang community, which led to drug addiction.

My father was never there man... you see... he was a gangster, drug addict, there was domestic violence in the home you know so my mum like... she saw that I started to follow in my father's footsteps. (Roberto)

The themes of broken families and hostile homes are important findings for interventions to take note of. Often, interventions aim to help a person off the street by reuniting them with their family. Unfortunately, as shown by this theme, this particular intervention may often be counterproductive as the person's family may be the reason for which they left to live on the streets in the first place.

Financial difficulties.

Research drawn on in the review and rationale chapter listed financial difficulties as a causal factor for homelessness emerged as a causal theme in this research as well. In Matthew's account of his wife falling ill (as quoted above), essentially it was financial difficulty which caused him

to leave his job in order to look after his wife, as they couldn't afford hospital care. In community psychology theory, society and individual are intricately linked (Campbell, 2004). It could be said in the example of Matthew that the society around him played a pivotal role in him ending up on the streets.

Involvement in gangs.

Another theme which emerged primarily in Roberto's account was the involvement in gangs in the search for social support after the trauma of growing up with his abusive father.

Look there were a lot of people I looked up to you know... gangsters, drug addicts, prostitutes... like brothers and sisters. (Roberto)

Roberto became sought after by the police, causing his mother to kick him out the house. *Because my mother was very strict with me... the second time I was out because the cops came looking for me. (Roberto)*

Once again, this theme can be analysed through the lens of community psychology which states that the behaviour of the individual is influenced by their environment (Teufel-Shone, Siyuja, Watahomigie & Irwin, 2006). Roberto's behaviour in seeking out a gang could be due to lack of social support and healthy role models in his life.

Substance abuse.

Substance abuse was another prominent theme. As stated in the review and rationale chapter, quantitative research reveals a correlation between substance abuse and homelessness (Roets et al., 2016). The following findings reveal first-hand accounts of the influence of substance abuse, which may help inform institutions dealing with those who are fighting an addiction whilst living on or coming off the streets.

Keith mentioned that his family members abused drugs, which made his home environment difficult to live in as he felt unaccepted.

that's when the problem started, I told her (Keith's mother) what's happening in her own house, who is using drugs, but to me I dunno, I told my mum many times, I think I must also be using drugs then you gonna see me... then you can be happy, because I am against all that stuff. (Keith)

Each participant spoke about the influence of either drugs or alcohol in their own lives. This finding echoed international qualitative research mentioned in the review and rationale chapter where addiction was described as something which kept people from leaving the streets (Kidd & Davidson, 2007)

In the focus groups, addiction was mentioned as a causal factor for homelessness. Matthew felt that many of his peers on the streets were there because the family had kicked them out due to their addictions.

if the family don't like the way they're drinking or they're drugging, so ya. They end up on the streets. (Matthew)

Addiction was also mentioned as a mode of survival once on the streets. Some started using drugs or alcohol as a method of keeping warm at night, which in turn became a habit.

it's cold at night, and early in the morning, so many of us we used to, before we went to sleep.... We... ok how do you say it, we take a dop, to keep our body warm, because you know, if it's cold you can't sleep, and I was getting used to that, drinking (Keith)

Use of drugs or alcohol also seemed to be a communal part of living on the streets. Matthew explained that there was the group who drank and the group who did drugs.

the drinkers will know the druggies and the druggies will know the drinkers but it's two different groups. (Matthew)

This theme is important to take note of, because whether a person is using a substance before living on the streets, or only starts using a substance once on the street, from these men's accounts it seems that the street is an environment that is not conducive to stopping an addiction. What I learned during my involvement with shelters through the research project is that the rules in most homeless shelters stipulate that a person cannot utilise the shelter unless they are sober and not using drugs, which may explain the statistic mentioned in the literature review, that only 9% of people living on the streets utilise the shelters (Kok et al., 2010). I therefore argue that addiction, which is caused or perpetuated by living on the street, then becomes the barrier preventing people from coming off the streets. This argument is echoed in an international qualitative research project where participants reported that they needed to overcome addiction in order to get off the streets (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Interventions need to take this factor of

addiction into consideration. If statistics are correct in saying that most people living on the street are using substances (Roets et al., 2016), then there is a need to find a way to help people out of their addictions whilst helping them off the street as well. Expecting a person to overcome an addiction in order to get into a shelter is not practical when the person is living in an environment which could have started the addiction in the first place.

The difficulties of living on the street

Once on the street, the men described life as being extremely challenging. Meeting basic needs of safety, finding food, warmth, and getting rest were a daily struggle. Other difficulties with living on the streets included fighting addiction, keeping clean, struggles of finding employment, and stigma from the community.

While discussing the following themes, I argue that these difficulties also created barriers which made it harder for the participants to leave the streets.

Safety

Difficulties with safety included trying to keep safe from the police, and trying to keep one's belongings safe.

The men explained how important it was to try and find a place to sleep where the police would not find you and chase you away, and if caught, often belongings were taken as well.



Bedroom.

This is what sleeping outside was like before I moved into the shelter: it was very cold, it wasn't safe so I couldn't sleep well, sometimes the police would come and chase me away, or my own friends would steal my things while I was asleep. In the day I had to carry all my belongings with me, especially my bedding, I didn't have anywhere to put

them or a place that was my own. If my things were taken, I had to try and find more blankets before the next night, otherwise I only had cardboard to sleep on. (Keith)

The men spoke about how difficult it was to find a place for one's belongings. One had to choose between carrying your bedding, clothes, and other belongings with you at all times, or, as seen in Keith's description above, or else risk hiding them.

Finding food

Soup kitchens were spoken very highly of in the focus group sessions. However, the men explained that these were not open every day and participants said they would often have to walk far to reach the soup kitchens. Keith explained it as follows,



Food.

It wasn't easy to find food when I lived on the streets. This was one of the best meals I had and I am very thankful to the soup kitchens, there were a lot of them but we had to walk far every day to find them. (Keith)

Getting rest

According to the participants, getting rest was another challenge they faced daily whilst living on the streets. Finding a safe and quiet place to sleep was difficult, and so was surviving the cold. Roberto explains his experience.

Longest I didn't sleep for was ten or eleven days, you know... sometimes because of the cold... the place where I had with the police, (laughs) I didn't take a chance with the places where I'd sleep. (Roberto)

I argue that this analysis explains at least in part why it is so difficult for people to come off the streets. When a person is struggling for their basic needs every day, they won't have the

energy to focus on trying to exit. Kidd and Davidson's (2007) international qualitative research showed how people living on the streets adopted a homeless mind-set, which made it very difficult for them to return to 'normal' society. I feel that this homeless mind-set could be linked to the mind only having capacity to focus on the basic needs. Furthermore, in understanding the process of empowerment as one where a person's mind-set about their self-worth needs to change and opportunities for being in a position of power need to be available to them (Campbell, 2004), one could say that in constantly having to fight for their daily needs, these men were being continuously disempowered. Basic resources such as food and rest were not accessible to them, giving them little power over even caring for themselves. Having to constantly ask others for these basic needs would have further perpetuated the mind-set that they are not in control and not in any form of power.

Stigma from the community

Olufemi (2002) wrote about the stigma associated with living on the streets. The topic of stigma was raised in the focus group discussions and the men explained the drastic effect it had on their morale.

When discussing the challenge of finding jobs, the men spoke of how attitudes from members of the community affected their self-esteem. Matthew described an example of one such interaction.

It's one of the restaurants that's very into sushi, and on his window he advertised, help wanted or help needed apply inside, so well I mean this was before I got into the program, and I went inside, I didn't even get as far as the front door, it was just "no no no please leave!". (Matthew)

Simon also described how his experiences of stigma from the community affected his self-esteem, making it difficult to even try searching for a job.

Can I say, it's just the more you get broken down, how is it possible to go in for an interview, with the little confidence you have with people doing this and that now you must still try and... (Kerry: sell yourself) ya and, to go into a restaurant and you think maybe he saw me in that road and this and... ya so people put you down and then it's hard to come up. (Simon)

Therefore, stigma from the community made it difficult for these men to leave the streets. According to community psychology theory, an individual's behaviour is influenced by the environment which they are in (Campbell, 2004). Stigma from the community caused these participants to devalue themselves, hence making the process of searching for work and trying to get off the streets even more challenging. In order to facilitate change and to help individuals to come off the streets, community awareness needs to be raised to try and prevent people from treating those living on the streets this way.

Positive effects of the OBSID intervention

Three of the participants were staying in a second tier shelter and were participating in OBSID's job shadowing program. From the interventions and shelter, two of the three men were able to stay off the street, stay clean of previous addictions, and study towards future careers as a security guard and as a handyman. One of these men is also going back to finish his grade 11 and matric year. I feel that these interventions have been successful as a result of being invested in the lives of these men at multiple levels. In the analysis of the difficulties of homelessness, I spoke about the disempowerment of these men when they had to fight for their basic needs every day. When the men were given cameras with which to show their story, all three took photographs of their beds, which represented rest, warmth and security, and their lockers, which showed that they had a secure place to keep their belongings.



New Bedroom.

Now in the shelter, I have my own warm bed. I don't need to worry about my things getting stolen and I have a locker to keep my things in. I have a place to call home.

Keith

They each took a photograph of the shelter's dining room which represented the availability of food.



The Kitchen.

When waking up getting something to eat took time and effort. Waking up in the morning, what came to my mind was money, food, drugs. So now, this for me is a privilege... being able to sit in a dining room, having three meals a day. Now that I have a full belly I am focused and happy, and concentrated on good things. Life is good! (Roberto)

To someone with a roof over their head, these may seem like mundane things to take photographs of, especially when you have a limited amount to display at an exhibition. However, the fact that the men took these photographs showed what a difference it made having these needs met. As mentioned in the quote above, Roberto explained how he could focus and concentrate on other things when the basic need of food was provided. These men were empowered by first being shown that they were important enough to be given these basic needs every day and, secondly by being given opportunities for employment through the OBSID program, and thirdly through social and spiritual growth through the shelter. In terms of fighting addiction, the men were given psychological help from the social workers, opportunities for physical exercise, and a choice to grow in their spiritual lives. These interventions were available

but not forced, giving them the chance to exercise agency in choosing their own paths. With the new work opportunities, the men reported that they were no longer stigmatised but looked up to.



Work.

This is me working. I love what I am doing, especially in my area, most of the residents say good morning me, a lady comes out on her morning jog; “Good morning, Keith! How are you doing? Thank-you for keeping our streets clean”. I didn’t have that before. I worked as a car guard before (while he was homeless) and not everyone respected me, I felt like they chose not to see me. Now that I’m working I’m not invisible anymore. (Keith)

Unfortunately, despite the interventions, Matthew still struggled with an alcohol addiction and ended up back on the streets. Both OBSID and the shelter are doing what they can to bring him back. Matthew’s story reveals that interventions won’t work for everyone. However, that should not prevent them from being provided. If interventions are able to help some out of oppression from society and the cycle of entrapment, then they are still worth carrying forward. Specifically, in Matthew’s case, he revealed to us in later discussions that he is terminally ill with cancer. I theorise that the main reason why Matthew dropped out is that, with the knowledge that he has little time to live, he will not want to spend his last moments on earth struggling with withdrawal symptoms from rehabilitation for the sake of having a bed in a shelter. At the same time, one must recognise that in order to run efficiently, shelters need rule systems. However, for interventions to help people off the streets effectively and prevent some

from falling through the cracks, exceptions or different/ adaptable programs should be made for individuals similar to Matthew, so that instead of spending his last days on the street, he is granted the humane right, sober or not, to have a bed, food, and a roof over his head.

Secondary Analysis

The most important question to ask in community psychology research is whether the process benefited the participants (Campbell, 2004). In order to ensure that this benefit took place, a final focus group was held after the exhibition, which assessed the effect the photovoice process had had on the men's lives and what could be changed to improve the process in the future. The following thematic analysis of the focus group discusses the participants' process of developing critical consciousness, empowerment, and social capital through the photovoice project. Limitations to transformation due to the social structures which in place are also addressed.

Unfortunately, only Keith and Roberto attended, but Matthew's experience and where improvements could be made were discussed by the social auxiliary worker.

Development of critical consciousness.

Critical consciousness and social capital were two of three key elements from community psychology which were used in this research. Renowned social theorist Paulo Freire theorised that the most effective way to facilitate change within an individual is to allow them opportunity to effect change within their community (Campbell & Murray, 2004). This process is known as developing critical consciousness (Campbell & Murray, 2004). The participants conducted the exhibition with the aim of creating change within the community. In the final focus group, the men discussed how the exhibition had inspired them to change themselves. Roberto and Keith both spoke animatedly about new beginnings after this research process. Roberto described how the process of creating the exhibition inspired him to move forward and make changes in his life.

I'm making moves, man... I'm putting things in front of me, I'm doing positive things.
(Roberto)

Keith said that the process has made him more eager to reunite with his family.

shoo.... Ya it helped me a lot. Ya. All this dreams and you know, and the feelings I had for that people, that family of mine, and on the other hand my kids also. I can go and visit them. (Keith)

These are both good examples of the process of critical consciousness development.

Fostering of social capital within the community through the exhibition

During the time of the exhibition, Keith had the idea of writing a book about his journey, using a format similar to that of the photostories. He wants primarily to have the book to show his children when he reunites with them. A lady from the community who came to the exhibition has shown interest in helping him work on the book. She is a writer herself. We discussed with Keith how the book could be used not only for his children, but also to be shared with society to create awareness about homelessness and reduce the stigma associated with it. The impact which the exhibition had on this lady is a good example of building social capital in creating helpful networks and critical consciousness in how Keith's writing of a book will help transform both himself and the community he is in.

We discussed why they thought it was important that the photos and stories needed to be shown to others. They spoke about how then people could get involved to create change.

So they can take note of what's going on around them, (Social Worker: awareness?) aware yes, so they can be aware of what's going on around them and make a change. Like if they can give, what they can do with their time, how they can appreciate life more... you know. (Roberto)

The social auxiliary worker added that there was a big response from the community after the exhibition; further demonstrating how social capital was gained through the exhibition and the participants' stories.

Yes and I get a whole lot of phone calls, from people wanting to know how they can help, how they can contribute you know, so I was able to point them in the right directions, and... it's because of what you guys did, you know so so many other people are getting the right help now, the right guidance...So just because of you I'm sure that a lot of

homeless people will be in shelters now, instead of on the streets. (OBSID social auxiliary worker)

The process of becoming empowered

Campbell (2004) defines empowerment as the “psychosocial state in which a group of people feel confident and motivated that they can achieve important goals they set themselves where they have the skills and opportunities to do so.” (Campbell, 2004, p345). It could be said that organising and speaking at the exhibition was a goal which these men achieved. The men spoke of overcoming the challenges of stage fright.

standing in front of a pulpit with a crowd, it's not one of my strong points, so ya feel like I can do better, I was nervous. my memory faded. (Roberto)

However, they also described how the experience had felt good, seeing that people appreciated what they were doing. Keith said the following.

I actually felt good after that, ya, despite that I was nervous standing in front... ya, when they told me, Keith, you spoke well. (Keith)

Roberto mentioned how speaking about his story was a big step for him, it made him realise and celebrate the success of his decision to change.

That was... um, what can I say that was something huge for me man. You know, and why did all of this take place in the first place, is because I changed my life. I'm in a better space in my life, you know. Makes me feel like a positive influence, man. (Roberto)

Limitations

An important limitation to be aware of with doing research which focuses primarily on grass root and bottom-up change, is that some change is beyond the circle of control of the participants and the marginalised community of people living on the street which they represent. There is still a need for top-down social change to work in collaboration with bottom-up processes. Hence, developing social capital is only effective if policymakers in the network created play a part in creating change. However, the feedback which the social auxiliary worker received after the exhibition from people wanting to know how to help was encouraging, and showed that the exhibition had been successful in alerting some change agents within the community.

Conclusion

Summary

This research aimed to develop a deeper understanding into the causes of homelessness and barriers to leaving the streets through exploring first-hand accounts of the lived experiences of homelessness

The findings revealed that a combination of factors on different societal levels from the community to the individual, contributed to an individual ending up on the street. The themes spanned across different levels of society, from individual addiction, to family problems, to stigma from the community. The findings show that in order to combat the cycle of factors which cause and perpetuate homelessness, interventions need to focus on becoming multilevel and working together so that each of the factors can be addressed

When on the streets, finding the basic needs such as food, safety, and warmth was a daily struggle. When on the street, it would seem that a person is in basic survival mode, therefore has little energy to focus on trying to leave the streets. In contrast, themes from discussions and photographs of the shelter revolved around the joy of having these needs met, which allowed them to focus on overcoming addictions and improving their skills to create employment opportunities.

Lastly, in line with the community psychology theoretical framework, success of the research is evaluated on the impact it had on the participants and the community. A final focus group was held in the effort to answer this question and discussed in the secondary analysis chapter. Findings showed positive feedback around the participants' development of empowerment, critical consciousness and social capital.

Limitations

A prominent limitation to the research was the small sample size, and the drop out of Simon, and eventually Matthew before the final focus group. The research was also only limited to young middle aged males. As a result, the perspective from which the data was collected is narrow and different prominent themes may have emerged had more participants from varying backgrounds, ages and genders been involved. Despite this limitation, most of the themes emerging from the analysis coincided with quantitative and international qualitative research which was reviewed.

In light of this, I feel that though the perspective received from these men was still able to cover the most prominent comments in the homeless phenomenon.

Recommendations for Future Research

Firstly, in light of the limitations, I recommend more CBPR research to be conducted with participants of different genders, ages and economic backgrounds in order to get a more comprehensive understanding around the experiences of homeless.

Secondly, this research has found how factors causing and perpetuating homelessness interlink. From this finding, I recommend, that qualitative research into detailed understanding of each of the factors is needed so that interventions can be informed on how to address each of the causal factors or barriers which were found. For example, an in depth inquiry into the causes of substance abuse within the individual and family would be useful in advising prevention interventions.

Recommendations for Future Interventions

Prevention

In terms of intervention, there is a need for more programs in place which help prevent people from ending up on the street in the first place. Overarching everything, the social structure of inequality in South Africa needs to be addressed, as remaining effects of apartheid is often the start of all the other causal factors, working in the downward spiral into homelessness. On the community level, stigma around homelessness should be decreased by raising awareness using programs such as photovoice. programs. On a family and individual level, an increase in effective programs which aim to help broken families, promote education and drug counselling at schools, increase counselling services for teenagers and young adults, and more interventions aimed at preventing domestic violence should prevent others from ending up on the street by stopping the downward spiral before it starts. For families where members are struggling with drug addiction, mentoring programs and practical support need to be available to help the family who is responsible the person struggling with addiction, so that individuals are not kicked out of their homes due to their addiction.

Multilevel and multifaceted interventions for those on the street

From the research, it would seem that in order to help a person off the street, first and foremost, their physical needs must be met. Secondly, some type of mentorship or guidance counselling should be made available because it is likely that they have experienced trauma which caused them to end up on the streets, and living on the streets will have been a traumatic experience in and of itself. Providing counselling might help the person move forward in their lives. Rehabilitation for those who are struggling with addiction should be provided, and here I challenge the homeless shelter system that is in place which only accepts people once they are sober. More governmental funding is needed for rehabilitation centres so that people can come off the streets and work on overcoming their addiction simultaneously, rather than trying to break the habit whilst living on the streets.

Final word

In closing, the problem of homelessness is no simple matter. Interventions which aim only to help one area of homelessness, such as providing a person with shelter, are unlikely to be successful if other factors such as addiction, family difficulties and community stigma are not also addressed. There is still a long road to go in terms of finding solutions and people may still fall through the cracks of interventions, however, we need to understand that people are usually on the street because of a system that has failed them. If a collaboration of societal factors contributed to them ending up on the streets, a collaboration of society is needed to help them off the streets and back onto their feet again.

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Informed Consent Form 1
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY



Informed Consent Form
Rondebosch, 7701

Exploring the lived experiences of homelessness in a Cape Town suburb.

1. Invitation and Purpose

You are invited to take part in this study which explores the daily experiences of those living on the streets. I am a research student from the Psychology department at the University of Cape Town.

2. Procedures

- If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to be a part of a group discussion, where I will ask you and others in the group to speak about what it is like to live on the streets. In it I will ask you all to speak about how you came to live on the streets and what has made it difficult to leave the streets. After this, there will be a photography workshop where someone will teach you how to use disposable cameras. You will then be given two disposable cameras to borrow for a week. With the first camera I will ask you to take photographs of things that made you come to live on the street. With the second camera you can take photos of things that make it difficult for you to leave the streets. After one week, we will have another group discussion where I will ask you all to explain the photographs to me and why you chose to take them. In this talk you can also choose which photos you feel explain your experience the most and we will organise a day where you can all put your photographs on display in the community hall for people living in Observatory to see. We hope that your photographs and what you say about them will help the community in Observatory to understand what it is like to be living on the streets.
- Each group discussion and the one photography workshop should take 45minutes to an hour, however this is flexible and you can leave at any time with no consequences.

- Participating in this study is voluntary. You are free to leave the study at any time, without any consequences.

3. Risks, Discomforts & Inconveniences

- There should be very low risk in taking part in this study. We will inform you on the safest way to take photographs so as not to be in danger.
- Speaking about your experiences of living on the streets could bring up sensitive issues and could potentially be emotionally distressing. However, you will decide what you would like to discuss in the focus groups and you will not be obligated to speak about anything you do not feel comfortable speaking about.
- If you would like to contact a counsellor to further discuss your experiences, you can contact the organizations listed on the referral list.
- You might be inconvenienced by having to give up time for the focus groups, the photography training, taking photographs and the exhibition. Each of these should take at most an hour, which means a total of 5 hours of your time over the space of 2 months.

4. Benefits

This project gives you an opportunity to voice your opinions about and share your experiences of living on the streets, thus raising people's awareness about a side of it that they do not usually see.

5. Privacy and Confidentiality

- Focus Groups will happen in a private room and we will ask each member to keep what is discussed private. But we cannot guarantee that everyone in the group will do this. We as the researchers will ensure that recordings of the group discussions remain private and the recordings will be destroyed after I have taken the information I need from them.
- In any documents I write up after the study, your name will not be used.

You also have the right to request that any information you have shared be removed from the study. For the exhibition phase, you can choose whether or not you want to remain anonymous.

- A tape recorder will be used to record the interview. If you would like the tape recorder to be switched off at any time you have the right to request this. The tape recordings will be destroyed after I have written about the study.

- No one but myself and my university supervisor will listen to or have access to the tape recordings.

6. Secondary Participants: You will need to obtain verbal consent from anyone who you wish to photograph. The person will need to be informed of why you are taking the photograph and where it will be used. You will need verbal consent from the parent or guardian for photographs taken of minors (those under the age of 18).

7. Money Matters

n/a

8. Contact details

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study please contact Kerry-Lee Black on 0723656114 or Dr Shose Kessi at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT) 021 650 317.

To contact the chair of the ethics committee, please contact Rosalind Adams on

rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za or 021 650 3417

8. Signatures

I have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose, possible benefits, risks, and discomforts. I agree to take part in this research as a subject. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit this project at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any penalty or loss of benefits that I would otherwise be entitled to enjoy.

Participant's Signature

Date

Informed Consent Form 2
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY



Informed Consent Form
Rondebosch, 7701

Informed Consent Form for participation in Focus groups and recording of focus group discussions

I am aware that the focus groups will be recorded and have been informed that although confidentiality by the participants is encouraged, what I say is not guaranteed to not be spoken about outside of the group by other participants. I am aware that the researcher is the only person who will have access to the recording after the focus group and if what I say is used in her work my identity will remain anonymous.

Participant's Signature

Date

Informed Consent Form 3
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY



Informed Consent Form
Rondebosch, 7701

We will ask participants to sign this form at a later date in the study. They can participate in the study and choose to not have their photographs displayed or their identities revealed.

I give consent for the photographs I take to be displayed in an exhibition in Observatory and agree to my name being used in these photographs

Participant's Signature

Date