

Exploring empathy in intergenerational relationships from the perspective of a group of older people

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PREFACE

The candidate elected to write an article, with the support of her supervisor in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Research Psychology. The article will be submitted to the Journal of Intergenerational Relationships (JIR) as the research topic corresponds with the scope and aim of the journal.

JIR typically publishes articles that address intergenerational relationships evidenced in intergenerational practice, policy and research in familial and non-familial settings. The journal was specifically selected for publication as this article focuses on empathy in intergenerational relationships between older people (60 years and older) and younger people (around 16 years). This was done in an attempt to obtain an in-depth understanding of empathetic understanding in intergenerational relationships. The findings may be applied to the development of intergenerational programmes for practice purposes.

INTENDED JOURNAL AND GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

This article is written in accordance with the guidelines of the APA (American Psychological Association) Publication Manual, 6th ed. This is done in accordance with the prescriptions of the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, to which this article will be submitted.

The Journal of Intergenerational Relationships also has the following guidelines. Include relevant literature, research question(s), methodology, and results. Discuss implications for practice, policy, and further research in an emerging multidisciplinary field of study. Include conceptual, theoretical, and/or empirical content.

The manuscript may be approximately 15-20 typed pages double-spaced (approximately 5000 words including references and abstract). Under special conditions, a paper with 6000 words could be considered.

More direct information concerning the proposed submission can be retrieved from the website.

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I am eternally thankful to my heavenly Father who guides me with grace, love and strength.

I also need to thank the amazing people who assisted, guided, supported, encouraged and bore with me throughout this phase of my studies.

In particular, I should like to thank Prof Vera Roos for her wisdom, guidance and encouragement. Her assistance far exceeded the duties expected of a supervisor and without her this thesis would not exist. I also want to thank Dr Jaco Hoffman, who was always willing to share his deep and invaluable knowledge.

Thank you to my colleagues, friends and family for your constant support, love and understanding, and especially to my husband Wesley, who never stopped believing in me.

To the participants in Vaalharts, thank you for sharing your intimate life stories and wisdom and for the opportunity to glimpse your unique world.

To every individual who made this endeavour possible and for the opportunity not only to expand my knowledge but also to expand the quality of my existence, I say thank you. “What we find changes whom we become.” – Peter Merville.

OPSOMMING

Intergenerasionele-verhoudings verwys na verhoudings tussen mense in alternatiewe generasiegroepe. Die toenemende getal ouer mense oor die hele wêreld beklemtoon die noodnagheid vir studies oor sielkundige prosesse wat welstand bevorder deur intergenerasionele-verhoudings. Mense van verskillende generasies is mede-afhanklik vir versorging en ondersteuning. Ouer mense maak deel uit van 'n uiteenlopende groep mense: sommiges mag 'n vermindering in energie, fisieke, finansiële en emosionele hulpbronne ervaar, terwyl ander oor goeie gesondheid, finansiële sekuriteit en 'n stabiele sosiale ondersteuningsnetwerk beskik. Wat alle mense, ouer mense ingesluit, egter in gemeen het, is 'n behoefte aan betekenisvolle verhoudings. Dit maak dit die moeite werd om die ervarings van verhoudings met jonger mense uit die perspektief van ouer mense te ondersoek. Hierdie studie is belangrik omdat navorsing aandui dat die verhoudings tussen ouer mense (60 jaar en ouer) en adolessente en jong volwasse nes gespanne is. 'n Aanvanklike studie van intergenerasionele-sorgervarings uit die oogpunt van mense van 60 jaar en ouer en jongmense in die middel-adolessente ontwikkelingsfase (ongeveer 16 jaar) het 'n gebrek aan empatie van die ouer generasie teenoor die jonger generasie getoon. Daar is besluit om in hierdie studie spesifiek te fokus op intergenerasionele-empatie. Wedersydse empatiese begrip is voorgestel as 'n middel om uitdagings tussen lede van generasies wat moet meeding om beperkte hulpbronne te oorkom, veral in lae-hulpbron gebiede soos die spesifieke landelike Afrika-gemeenskap wat bestudeer is in Vaalharts, Suid-Afrika. Daar is voorgestel dat empatie die intergenerasionele-begrip kan verhoog tussen ouer en jonger mense wat onderskeie ontwikkelingsuitdagings te kampe het. Die navorsing is gedoen in 'n gemeenskap met hoë vlakke van armoede en beperkte fisiese en tasbare hulpbronne.

Die studie is kwalitatief van aard en het van 'n interpretatiewe beskrywende navorsingsontwerp gebruik gemaak. Hierdie ontwerp het die basis verskaf om die persepsies van empatie te ondersoek deur die gebruik van teoretiese konstrakte om 'n begrip van ervarings in die gemeenskap af te lei, meer spesifiek die van die ouer generasie. Die agtien (18) deelnemers was almal ouer as 60 en Setswana-sprekend, maar was ook Afrikaans en Engels magtig. Agt van die deelnemers (1 man en 7 vroue) het aan die Mmogo-metode® deelgeneem. Dit is 'n projektiewe tegniek wat visuele aanbiedings gebruik om 'n dieper insig te verkry in die betekenis wat tussen deelnemers ontwikkel. Vir die Mmogo-metode® is deelnemers (ouer mense) genooi om visuele voorstellings te maak van hoe hulle sorg ervaar in verhouding tot jongmense in die middel-adolessente ontwikkelingsfase, op ongeveer 16 jaar. 'n Verdere tien deelnemers wat nie deel was van die Mmogo-metode® nie, het deelgeneem aan semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude. Hierdie onderhoude het hulle die vryheid gebied om uit te brei oor hulle eie unieke ervarings. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude bied ook 'n sekere mate van struktuur vir die onderhoudvoerder om seker te maak dat gedetailleerde inligting oor empatie wat voortspruit uit relevante gesprekke verkry word.

Data is ontleed deur die gebruik van 'n induktiewe benadering asook tematiese analise van ervarings omtrent intergenerasionele-sorg: empatie (en spesifiek 'n gebrek aan empatie) het na vore gekom as 'n herhalende tema. Die literatuur toon 'n verband tussen empatie en sorg, wat dienoooreenkomstig gedien het as die fokus van hierdie studie. Die data is verder onderwerp aan 'n direkte vorm van inhouds-analise (deduktiewe kategorie-toepassing), wat gedoen is nadat literatuur en teorieë oor intergenerasionele-empatie geraadpleeg is. 'n Visuele analise is gedoen op die visuele aanbiedings wat die deelnemers gebou het as deel van die Mmogo-metode®.

Betroubaarheid is verseker deur die beginsels wat voorgestel is in Guba se model van betroubaarheid, wat insluit: verkryging van in diepte beskrywings, versekering van geloofwaardigheid, bevestiging van lede se verduidelikings en versekering van bevestigbaarheid. Etiese toestemming om hierdie studie te doen is deur die Menslike Navorsingsetiekkomitee van die Fakulteit van Gesondheidswetenskappe van die Universiteit van Noord-Wes gegee (verwysingsnommer NWU-00053-10-S1). 'n Persoon wat as tussenganger tussen die Universiteit en die gemeenskap dien is gebruik om toegang te verkry tot die gemeenskap waarna sy ook die ingeligte toestemming van die deelnemers gekry het.

Die gebrek aan empatie uit die perspektief van die ouer mense het na vore gekom in die manier waarop ouer mense die verhouding met die jongmense uitsluitlik uit hulle eie perspektief gesien het en uit hul onvermoë om hulself in die posisie van die jonger mense te plaas. Ouer mense was aanvanklik nie in staat om die jongmense in hulle omgee-verhoudings te visualiseer nie; hulle het negatiewe en veroordelende gesindhede teenoor hulle geopenbaar en het waargeneem dat die jongmense die wysheid van hulle ouers of ouer mense verwerp. Ouer mense het hulle na buitestaanders gewend om hulle te help om met jongmense te kommunikeer en hulle te dissiplineer. Die gebrek aan empatie aan die kant van ouer mense teenoor jongmense kan ernstige gevolge hê vir hulle noodsaaklike intergenerasionele-verhoudings. Dit word aanbeveel dat gemeenskap-gebaseerde ingrypings ontwikkel word om empatie tussen die twee generasies te bevorder.

Sleutelwoorde: empatie, intergenerasionele-verhoudings, jonger mense, lae-hulpbron-gemeenskappe, ouer mense, persepsies.

SUMMARY

Intergenerational relationships refer to relationships between people in alternate generational groups. The increasing numbers of older people all over the world highlight the need for studies on psychological processes that enhance well-being through intergenerational relationships. People from different generations are co-dependent for care and support. Older people constitute a diverse group: some may experience a depletion of energy, physical, financial and emotional resources, while others have good health, financial security and stable social support networks. What all people, including older people, have in common, however, is a need for meaningful relationships. This makes it worthwhile to explore the experiences of relationships with younger people from the perspective of older people. This study is important because research indicates that the relationships between older people (60 years and older) and adolescents and young adults are strained. An initial study on intergenerational care experiences from the perspective of people aged 60 years and older and young people in the middle-adolescent developmental phase (at 16 years) revealed a lack of empathy from the older generation towards the younger generation. It was decided to focus in this study on intergenerational empathy specifically. Mutual empathetic understanding is suggested as a means to overcome challenges between members of generations that have to compete for limited resources, especially in low-resource areas such as the specific rural African community studied in Vaalharts, South Africa. It is suggested that empathy could increase intergenerational understanding between older and younger people dealing with their respective developmental challenges. The research was conducted in a community with high levels of poverty and limited physical and material resources.

The study is qualitative in nature and used an interpretive descriptive research design. This design provided the basis to explore the perceptions of empathy by using theoretical constructs to derive an understanding of experiences in the community and specifically

those of the older generation. The 18 participants were all older than 60 and Setswana speaking but were also proficient in Afrikaans and English. Eight of the participants (1 man and 7 women) participated in study using the Mmogo-method®. This is a projective technique that uses visual presentations to gain a deeper insight into meaning that is developed between the participants. For the Mmogo-method®, participants (older people) were invited to make visual representations of how they experienced care in relation to young people in the middle adolescent developmental phase, at around 16 years. A further 10 participants (4 men and 6 woman), who were not part of the Mmogo-method® project, participated in semi-structured interviews. These interviews provided them the freedom to elaborate on their own unique experiences. Semi- structured interviews also provide a certain amount of structure for the interviewer to make sure that detailed information on empathy in arising relevant conversations are obtained.

Data were analysed using an inductive approach as well as thematic analysis of experiences about intergenerational care: empathy (and specifically, a lack of empathy) emerged as a recurrent theme. The literature shows a connection between empathy and care, which accordingly served as the focus of this study. The data were further subjected to a directed form of content analysis (deductive category application) which was conducted after literature and theory on intergenerational empathy have been consulted. A visual analysis was conducted on the visual presentations that the participants built as part of the Mmogo-method®.

Trustworthiness was ensured by using the principles proposed by Guba's model of trustworthiness and that include: obtaining thick descriptions, ensuring credibility, member checking and ensuring confirmability. Ethical consent to conduct this study was given by the Human Research Ethics committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences in the North-West

University (reference number NWU-00053-10-S1). A gatekeeper was used to gain access to the community studied and participants gave their informed consent.

The lack of empathy from the perspective of the older people emerged from the way in which older people viewed the relationship with the young solely from their own perspective and from their inability to place themselves in the position of the younger persons. Older people were at first unable to visualize the young in their caring relationships; they expressed negative and judgemental attitudes towards them and perceived that the young people are rejecting the wisdom of their elders. Older people resorted to outsiders to assist in communicating with and disciplining the young. The lack of empathy on the part of the older people for the young can have dire effects on their vital intergenerational relationships. It is recommended that community-based interventions be developed to promote empathy between the two generations.

Keywords: empathy, older people, intergenerational relationships, younger people, perceptions, low-resource communities.

PERMISSION TO SUBMIT ARTICLE FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSES

The candidate opted to write an article, with support of her supervisor, I hereby give my permission that this article may be submitted for examination as per requirements of the qualification

Master of Arts in Research Psychology

Prof. Vera Roos

DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER

I hereby declare that this research manuscript, **Exploring empathy in intergenerational relationships from the perspective of a group of older people**, is my own work and that all sources have been fully referenced and acknowledged.

Furthermore I declare that this dissertation was edited by a qualified language editor as prescribed.

Finally I declare that this research was submitted to Turn-it-in and a satisfactory report was received stating that plagiarism had not been committed.

Anri Wheeler

DECLARATION BY THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

I hereby declare that I have language-edited the thesis, **Exploring empathy in intergenerational relationships from the perspective of a group of older people** by Anri Wheeler for the degree of MA Research Psychology.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

This investigation is part of a larger research project that is situated within the North-West University's WIN project which is conducted in Vaalharts. The project aims to investigate the socio-cultural context in the rural Vaalharts area, by using qualitative research strategies to get an in-depth understanding of the different socio-cultural dimensions. This includes intergenerational relationships (Dennefer, 2010). Intergenerational data were obtained by applying visual research methods to the way in which care was experienced by older (60+) and younger (16-) people in the rural community in Vaalharts in South Africa. Data were analyzed in two phases. The first encompassed an inductive analysis from which themes such as judgemental views and a linear understanding of the relationship from the perspective of older people emerged. Since the findings alluded to a lack of empathy it was decided to explore empathy or the absence of empathy deductively in the second phase of the analysis. This was done using a directed approach to content analysis known as deductive category application (Mayring, 2000). The method uses existing theories in guiding the initial coding (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). This second-phase analysis confirmed the lack of empathy which had been identified in the first-phase analysis and it was accordingly decided to focus the study specifically on manifestations of empathy in intergenerational caring relationships from the perspective of older people.

The aim of this literature study is to present and clarify theories, concepts and results of previous studies consulted during the research process. The literature study consists of three segments. The first presents literature on intergenerational relations (specifically in the African context) as well as the role of empathy, the effects of a lack of empathy and how empathy relates to care in intergenerational relationships. The second segment is a discussion of previous studies on intergenerational relations about these two generational groups (older people aged 60 years and older and younger people aged 16 years and younger) as well as developmental theories

regarding the two generations. The last segment focuses on existing intergenerational theories that were consulted in this study.

Literature review of related concepts

Intergenerational relationships are globally becoming an increasingly important field of research in view of the rapidly growing number of older people all over the world (Roos, 2011). Due to various challenges associated with old age, many older people might not always be able to care for themselves physically or emotionally (Foreword, 2009). Competing for resources is a reality confronting many older people as a result of increasing socio-economic difficulties throughout the world, which in turn contribute to poverty and depletion of resources (Mayosi et al., 2009; Hope, 2009). This then enhances the dependence of communities on intergenerational relationships for care and support (Brandt, Haberkern, & Szydlik, 2009; Seekings & Natrass, 2005).

Intergenerational relations are understood to be any form of contact and exchange between different generations (Wolf & Ballal, 2006). Familial intergenerational relationships refer to relationships between different generations in one family, such as children, parents, and grandparents (Vanderbeck, 2007). Social intergenerational relationships refer to different cohorts who share the same historical and socialization background (Swartz, 2009). This study focused on social intergenerational relationships.

Empathy and care are presented in literature as interrelated constructs (Szydlik, 2008). Care is a construct that manifests in relationships where both the carer and the person who receives care participate to avoid inflicting harm and to promote overall well-being (Pettersen, 2011). Care consists of multiple interdependent parts, which include physical, financial, social and emotional care (Hammington & Miller, 2006). Physical and financial care refer to assistance such as: cleaning, shopping, preparing food and financial support (Brandt et al., 2009). Social care refers to social institutions offering caring services such as

nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, psychological treatment facilities and emergency services (Curtis, 2012). Emotional care on the other hand refers to aspects such as love, unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathy (Szydlik, 2008). Empathy is considered to be one of the most significant aspects of emotional care (Szydlik, 2008). For the purpose of this study empathy was defined as the ability to enter into and understanding, through taking on and experiencing the feelings of others, in a manner that refrains from judgement (Goldman, 2006; Segal, 2006). The opposite of empathy is the inability to understand another person's perspective, resulting in a lack of adequate emotional responses to another person's behaviour and emotions (Ritter et al., 2011).

Empathy enhances a mutual understanding of other people's views, needs and beliefs (Lowenstein, 2007). Empathy is an essential emotional part of care because it enables a person to understand the unique caring needs of another person in a relationship (Decety & Ickes, 2009; Kirman & Teschl, 2010). Therefore empathy cannot be separated from care and cannot properly be understood without also understanding care (Juujärvi, 2003).

In order to understand the significant role that empathy plays in emotional care it is important first to understand that care is an attribute that grows and develops as the human body and mind develop (Monserud, 2008). In the infant stage, care is expressed in a one-sided manner whereby the infant is often a passive recipient of care (Pettersen, 2011). When care is fully developed it is known as mature care, which indicates a shift from self-centeredness to the recognition of the interests of others through empathy (Juujärvi, 2003). Thus to fully care emotionally with empathy in an intergenerational relationship requires the relational parties to have the abilities to care in a mature way (Hammington & Miller, 2006). Care is often misconstrued as part of intimate romantic and familial relationships (Juujärvi, 2003). Care is, however, also of fundamental value in intergenerational relationships. This is as care enhances the other generation's quality of life by promoting support, affect and trust (Monserud, 2008).

Empathy within care enhances the ability to care not only on an intimate level but also for the community or further distant generations through the understanding of the other generations' need for the caring relationship (Daatland & Herlofson, 2001). In this sense empathy is often strongly linked to emotional intelligence (Segal, 2006). It can thus be deduced that empathy is an inseparable part of care (Juujärvi, 2003), and enables intergenerational understanding, compassion and collaboration (Biggs, Haapala, & Lowenstein, 2011). A lack of empathy can thus be presented as an inability to care emotionally for the other people (Juujärvi, 2003), which includes other generations.

Empathy has different meanings in literature but for the purpose of this study it will be defined as a personal and relational quality that requires seeing the world from someone else's viewpoint. This is done by imagining the possible thoughts and emotions the other might be experiencing and then responding appropriately (Huckvale, 2011). Empathy requires people to reflect on how they have felt and been responded to in similar situations (Huckvale, 2011).

According to Elliott, Bohart, Greenberg and Watson (2011) empathy consists of different elements. Empathy is part of emotional care and implies understanding of another person's situation and caring needs through active listening and then by demonstrating appropriate actions and behaviour aimed at the promotion of the well-being of others (Bodie, 2011; Petterson, 2011). The listening element of empathy is the active process of attending in order to understand, receive and interpret information (Samovar, Rorter, & McDaniel, 2009). Empathetic listening is also known as reflective listening because it involves motivation and commitment in order to understand another person's messages and respond at an appropriate level and in an appropriate manner using verbal and nonverbal feedback (Elliott et al., 2011). In this sense empathic listening is the opposite of selfish listening, which means listening in conversations only to topics that capture your own curiosity and interest (Bodie, 2011).

True empathy also included the element of understanding and meaning to understand another person's thoughts and feelings in such a way that they can be accurately repeated, described and expressed (Elliott et al., 2011). This process is described as the accurate imitating and replicating of behaviour, thoughts and feelings of another person (Samovar et al., 2009). A lack of empathy can thus be seen in the inability to understand and imitate the position of someone else in regard to their behaviour, thoughts, motivations and beliefs (Elliott et al., 2011).

Refraining from judgement is one of the most important elements of empathy (Biggs et al., 2011). This means to move away from a self-centred position of analysing situations solely from one's own perspective and judging behaviour and attitudes from one's own pre-conceived ideas and beliefs (Lardén, Melin, Holst, & Långström, 2006). Refraining from judgement means to acquire a broader look and the mindset of rationally understanding others from their own unique perspective and situation (Lardén et al., 2006).

In essence, empathy in intergenerational relationships means to place oneself in the position of a member of the other generation (Biggs et al., 2011). It implies analyzing another person's reality as objective data and having the ability to experience the other person's world. It is to see and feel with the other person by temporarily becoming the other person, to borrow his or her perceptions and interpretations and then return them after effectively understanding the other's situation (Juujärvi, 2003; Hill, Watson, Rivers, & Joyce, 2007).

Being empathetic carries many social advantages: it creates a safe and non-judgemental environment in intergenerational relationships in that being empathetic eliminates bias and self-centeredness (Juujärvi, 2003). Social empathy expands on this micro-perspective to include the social and political structures of the community (Segal, 2006). Building social empathy is advantageous because people with empathy are more likely to be civic-minded and become responsible citizens (Stout, 2005).

Empathy in intergenerational relationships is suggested as providing an essential tool in overcoming challenges between generations (Biggs et al., 2011). Empathetic intergenerational relationships are characterized by reduced anxiety and stress, minimal aggression, mutual understanding, more autonomy and self-appreciation, social competency, adjustability and even less physical pain and illness (Meier & Brawley, 2011; Stout, 2005). Rogers (1986) emphasized the importance of empathy in relationships. He believed that every person has the underlying potential to lead a positive, productive and self-actualizing life if the seed carrying this potential is nurtured through healthy relationships. He maintained that three attributes were essential in creating a positive climate for relational growth: congruence, unconditional positive regard and accurate empathy. Rogers saw an empathetic environment within relationships as crucial for growth (Corey, 2012). Ultimately people with empathetic abilities are often better listeners and achieve good open communication with other generations (Decety & Ickes, 2009).

A lack of empathy in intergenerational relationships has been reported to contribute to selfishness, violence, bullying, aggression, stress, isolation, frustration, mistrust, miscommunication and unwillingness to make compromises to sustain important ties with the other generation (Hargie, 2011; Morisson & Downing, 2007). This unwillingness can be seen in situations in which relational parties prefer looking for outside help to restore the relationship rather than conversing, negotiating and mending the relationship themselves (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004). Older people who do not experience empathy in relationships with the younger generation have stated that they feel unsafe, hurt, misunderstood and uncared-for (Gorden, 2003). On the other hand, the younger generation has also reported feeling misunderstood and overlooked in intergenerational relationships without empathy and this can contribute to a lack of interest from the younger generation in maintaining relationships with the older generation (Biggs et al., 2011). A lack of empathy can thus contribute to the troubling fragility, isolation and distancing of intergenerational relationships (Biggs et al., 2011). This can be especially

detrimental to older people who need healthy intergenerational relationships for care and assistance (Decety & Ickes, 2009).

In the African context, social intergenerational relationships are of specific importance because the majority of older people in rural African areas live in multigenerational households consisting of familial and non-familial members (Wolf & Ballal, 2006). Some of these older people live with friends or distant relatives while their children work elsewhere (Wolf & Ballal, 2006). Most of the rural areas in Africa have very limited physical resources such as food, education and health care (Kowal, Kahn, Naidoo, Abdullah, & Bawah, 2010; Mayosi et al., 2009). All these factors contribute to older people in rural areas of South Africa being especially reliant on the younger community (not just family members) for care and assistance (Aboderin, 2006). It is thus vital for the older generation that their social intergenerational relationships are nurtured and kept healthy (Williams & Howard, 2006). Empathy for and by the younger generation can contribute to healthy, nurtured intergenerational relationships, especially in the African context.

Many rural African communities endorse the values implied by collectivism, which means that a person is not an isolated individual, but someone living within a community (Chilisa, 2012; Mbiti, 1969). In this community context, people are invited to recognize that they can attain their own true well-being by promoting the well-being of others (Lutz, 2009). This suggests understanding and promoting the other generation's caring needs, wants, beliefs, feelings and state of being that can only be achieved through empathetic understanding (Daatland & Herlofson, 2001; Hargie, 2011). This need is even greater in vulnerable communities with limited resources (Casale, Drimie, Quinlan, & Ziervogel, 2009).

Vulnerability within a community has major implications for external and internal functioning (Biggs et al., 2011; Adger, 2006). External implications include risks, shocks and stress to which an individual or household is subject; the internal implications include a

lack of emotional means for coping with losses (O'Brien, 2004). Rural areas in South-Africa have experienced increasing strain in intergenerational relationships in the post-apartheid years (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). Children born after 1994 (the "born-frees") are exposed to a completely different world from their grandparents': all educational institutions are now open to all races; people of all races can travel freely anywhere in Africa and the world and be employed in any company, service and sector (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Mattes 2012). As a result, younger African people are moving into the middle and higher economic classes and those who still live in rural areas have better education opportunities and future prospects (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005) than previous generations. All these factors contribute to a distancing in relationships between the elderly African people, who were largely oppressed, and the younger generation, which has vastly improved opportunities and rights within the new South Africa (Benwell, 2009; Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010). Empathy in vulnerable communities is of the utmost significance because it can enhance intergenerational support and decrease the distance between generations (Erikson & O'Brien, 2007; Lowenstein, 2007).

Intergenerational Relations: Older People and Middle Adolescents

Previous studies conducted with older people and middle adolescents indicated that older people feel estranged from the younger ones (Alber, Van der Geest, & Reynolds Whyte, 2008; Ferreira, 2011; Nathan, 2012). Older people believe adolescents only want their own freedom and have no respect for traditional values and the teachings of their elders. Older people experience feelings of discomfort, expressed as frustration and fear, in relation to younger people (16 years of age and younger) (Ferreira, 2011; Nathan, 2012; Roos, 2011). Research also indicates specifically that the relationship between middle adolescents and older people is extremely negative and is viewed with ambivalence from both sides (Mabaso, 2011). This results in unsatisfactory relationships for both generations (Ferreira, 2011). It

also appears that tensions between these two generations are often sustained across generations, something that is not always observable from behaviour, attitudes and emotions, but forms part of subjective underlying experiences that emerge in the course of in-depth conversations (Roos, in press). These relational challenges associated with middle adolescents and older people contributed to the decision to focus this study on these two groups.

The 18 older people in this study are aged 60 years and older. According to Erikson's stage theory, these participants will fall into the maturity developmental stage, also called the stage of integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1950). This stage proposes that from the age of 60 individuals start experiencing a sense of mortality (Myers, 2007). This may be in response to retirement, the death of a spouse or close friends, or changing social roles. This final life crisis manifests itself as a review of the individual's life course. During this review the focus is on either accepting life and reflecting on it in a positive manner or feeling despair as a result of failures (Erikson, 1982). This stage is also associated with the passing of wisdom to younger generations and thus achieving life satisfaction and worthiness (Erikson, 1950). According to Erikson (1982), this introspection is mostly positive when experienced with loved ones. Ego integrity is the result of the positive resolution which implies viewing your whole life with satisfaction and contentment. Conversely, despair is the result of a negative resolution, which manifests itself as a fear of death, a sense that life is too short, and depression (Myers, 2007).

Middle adolescence spans the years between early adolescence (11-14), known as the struggle with a sense of identity, and late adolescence (18-21) when a firmer sense of identity and increased emotional stability are established. The middle adolescent life stage occurs around the age of 16 (Marcia, 1966). This is characterized by intense self-involvement, battling between high expectations and poor self-concept, continued adjustment to a changing

body, worries about being normal, a tendency to distance themselves from parents and grandparents, continued drive for independence, and a greater reliance on friends rather than family members (Whitmire, 2000). According to Marcia (1966), middle adolescence encompasses the years in which the formation of identity occurs. This is also a stage marked by rebellion in the struggle to establish one's unique identity in a community (Erikson, 1950; Whitmire, 2000). Erikson theorized that a young adult needs to be able to communicate and take in new ideas. Communication is a very vital part of Erikson's identity development. Without communication, people are unable to express their ideas, basic needs, or to communicate about their abilities. These all culminate in a healthy identity development (Erikson, 1982). Erikson also had views about the interaction of generations, called mutuality, which implies that intergenerational relationships can influence development (Erikson, 1982). This means that the actions or presence of one generation can have an influence on the development of another generation (Erikson, 1982). The older generation can thus influence the developmental stage of adolescence. Adolescents in this phase relate mostly with their peers and role models and often reject the opinions of older adults. The adolescents negotiate their newly-established unique identity in their community and will settle harmoniously into their community if they are allowed to contribute (Marcia, 1966). If they are not allowed to have their own opinions and contribute to the community they will withdraw from that community and people (Erikson, 1982). In rural Africa this can imply withdrawing from the older people in the community as well (Kohon & Carder, 2014).

Reciprocally adolescents can also influence the development of older people. Older people (60+) may start experiencing a detachment from the community because they may feel physically useless and thus rejected. This can result in older people being paranoid, spiteful, selfish and unable to understand other community members (Erikson, 1982) and can influence intergenerational relationships and empathy (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). If older

people feel unwanted by the youth it can contribute to an unwillingness to try and understand them (Mattes, 2012).

From the literature it is clear that empathetic understanding in intergenerational relationships is becoming increasingly important, especially for the older generation in Africa. (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). The rural African context provides a unique intergenerational situation in that the older people are faced with very limited physical, material and emotional resources that increase their reliance on the younger generations for care and assistance. Younger people in Africa that are unemployed are also more reliant on older people that receive pensions for financial assistance (Aborderin, 2006; Dennefer, 2010 ; Keasberry, 2001). In the community of Vaalharts scarce resources were identified in the lack of: basic government services (i.e. to register births, identification document/passport); basic municipal services (i.e. electricity, water); education or training-related services (i.e. tertiary education scholarships, school supplies, early childhood and elderly stimulation); employment and finances; food; infrastructure (i.e. housing, roads, sports grounds, recreational/youth centres); healthcare/welfare (shelters, coping skills, medicine, food, safety and security and emergency services) (Coetzee, 2011).

In the Vaalharts community as in other rural African communities the increased reliance between generations because of limited resources is in conflict with increasing negative and aggressive attitudes between younger and older generations in African communities (Aboderin, 2006). The developmental challenges as described by Erikson (1982) of older people (60+) and younger people (16-) can place further strain on intergenerational relationships.

Theories consulted in this study

Bengtson and Schrader (1982) expressed the importance of empathy as well as the effect of limited resources on empathy in their well-known intergenerational solidarity theory. Solidarity refers to reliable support or the willingness of the generations to provide

one another with services and assistance. This is not a one-sided exertion of influence but is understood as representative action including empathy, contributing to solidarity (Bengston & Schrader, 1982). They defined six elements of solidarity: affectual, consensual, structural, associational, functional, and normative (Daatland & Lowenstein, 2005). These elements have been identified to attempt to explain the relationship or connectedness between generations. The six elements of the model contribute different factors to the intergenerational relationship (Wood & Liopsis, 2007). Affectual solidarity is the measure of emotional closeness between generations and entails elements such as the presence of care and empathy in a relationship. Consensual solidarity is an indicator of similarity of beliefs and values between generations. Structural solidarity refers to demographic factors that effect opportunity for interaction between grandparents and grandchildren, such as geographic proximity, marital status, gender, age, income, education, and health of both generations. Associational solidarity is associated with the frequency of social contact and shared activities between the generations. Functional solidarity is the degree of help and assistance exchanged between grandchildren and grandparents. Finally, normative solidarity measures perceptions of obligations and expectations about intergenerational connectedness (Wood & Liopsis, 2007). Bengston and Schrader (1982) wanted to see how the six elements influence each other. In his studies he found that when structural variables such as residential proximity and health are not present it can have a longitudinal effect on affectual solidarity. It was shown that affection declined most rapidly of all the elements when structural elements declined (Bengston & Schrader, 1982). A lack of basic survival resources could thus have an effect on the availability emotional resources such as empathy (O'Brien, 2004).

Intergenerational solidarity theory proposes a structural way of measuring and examining the interaction of the elements of intergenerational solidarity within relationships (Winkelby, Cubbin, & Ahn, 2006). Researchers today are starting to realize, however, that

the intergenerational solidarity theory has certain limitations. The theory suggests that solidarity elements and implications are universal and can be generalized to all intergenerational relationships. The problem is that no two relationships are the same, for example, relational connectedness and intimacy in intergenerational relationships can also in some instances be too extensive and detrimental to relationships in the form of obsession or harmful relational dependency (Lüscher, 2002). It is thus becoming increasingly important to investigate each individual and individual intergenerational relationship as a subjective entity with personal attributes within the intergenerational system (Lüscher, 2002). In this way it is hoped to obtain a better understanding of the in-depth experience of each individual within the system (Lüscher, 2002). The structural elements of the intergenerational solidarity theory and subjective elements of each individual unique experience should thus be connected (Lüscher, 2002). In this study the intergenerational solidarity theory was used to provide a background understanding of the fundamental value of empathy within caring intergenerational relationships.

SIGT (Self-Interactional Group Theory) (Roos, in press) proposes that intergenerational relations be studied from intra-individual, inter-individual and group levels. The intra-individual level focuses on feelings and the presenting problem of members of both generations. The inter-individual level consists of the definition of the relationship, relational qualities, motivation for interactions between people as well as the interactional processes between people. The group level is focused on gaining insight into the group dynamics between generations. SIGT is suited for this study because it can be used to explain familial and non-familial intergenerational relations/interactions (Roos, in press).

SIGT theory addresses the limitations of the intergenerational solidarity in that it turns a spotlight on the subjective experiences of individuals. It also provides a useful explanation for the presence of empathy in intergenerational studies because it sees relationships between

people as continuous, reciprocal interactions informed by the subjective experiences and relational qualities between members such as congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy (Roos, in press)

Conclusion

Empathy is a crucial emotional resource that enhances understanding and positive regard and is able to address relational problems. More research is necessary to explore how empathy manifests in the specific rural African context between the older and younger generations. The absence of empathy between these generations can contribute to further relational strain. This study can contribute to the development of interventions to enhance empathy in this specific rural African community but also in other communities. All these needs and possibilities stress the importance of this study, which asks the question: How does empathy manifest in older people's experiences of care in intergenerational relationships with younger people?

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TITLE OF DISSERTATION, AUTHORS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Exploring empathy in intergenerational relationships from the perspective of a group of older people

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MANUSCRIPT FOR EXAMINATION

Abstract

The increase in the numbers of older people in the world underscores the importance of studies on psychological processes that can benefit intergenerational relationships. Older and younger generations are co-reliant for care and support, with older people often having to depend on younger generations more specifically for physical and emotional assistance. Empathy is proposed as a relational quality that deals with challenges between generations that have to compete for limited resources, especially in low-resource areas such as rural African communities. This study explored empathy in older people's (60 years and older) perceptions of the younger generation (16 years and younger) in the rural South African context of Vaalharts. This is a vulnerable community, lacking valuable physical, emotional and material resources. The study is qualitative in nature and used an interpretive descriptive research design. The 18 participants were all older than 60 and Setswana-speaking but were also proficient in Afrikaans and English. Eight of the participants, 1 man and 7 women, participated in a Mmogo-method® study, and 10 participants, who were not included in the Mmogo-method® (4 men and 6 women) participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using the principles of thematic analysis, directed content analysis (deductive category application) and visual analysis. The results indicated a lack of empathy on the part of the older people towards the youth in that they viewed the relationship only from their own perspective and had adopted very negative and judgemental attitudes towards the younger people. This showed an inability to put themselves in the position of the young. The implications of this lack of empathy were also identified. The older people were at first unable to visualize the young in their caring relationships; they perceived the young as rejecting their wisdom and teachings as elders who had acquired knowledge, and they called upon outsiders to assist with communication and disciplining the young. A lack of empathy in older people for the young can have dire effects on vital

intergenerational relationships. It is recommended that community-based interventions be developed to promote empathy between the two generations.

Keywords: African, care, community, empathy, intergenerational relationships, low-resource communities, older people, perceptions, younger people.

Introduction

This study is part of an overarching research project that aimed to investigate the experiences of care between older people (60 years and older) and younger people in the middle adolescent developmental phase (16 years and younger). In the course of an inductive analysis of the data, a number of themes emerged, including emotional and physical care and reciprocity. Prominent among these was the recurrent theme of empathy and, specifically, a lack of empathy. Care and empathy are treated in literature as connected constructs because empathy enables the individual to understand the unique caring needs of another person in a relationship (Decety & Ickes 2009; Kirman & Teschl, 2010). It was thus decided to focus exclusively on empathy and by means of deductive category application to explore how empathy manifests in the older peoples' experiences of giving care in relation to middle adolescents.

This research is important because intergenerational research is becoming increasingly significant in promoting greater understanding between generations that are co-reliant for care and support (Mabaso, 2011). This is substantiated by research that indicates that increasing numbers of older people (Wilmoth, Shkolnikov, & Barbieri, 2013) are reliant on intergenerational relationships for the provision of emotional and physical care (Klasena & Woolard, 2008; Roos, 2011), because many older people have to deal with declining physical mobility, mental health and insufficient energy (Aboderin, 2006; Dennefer, 2010; Keasberry, 2001). This emphasizes the importance of healthy intergenerational relationships (Kagitcibasi, Bilge & Diri, 2010).

Furthermore, the literature points increasingly to the existence of negative, strained relationships, especially in the African context, between the older and younger generations (Alber, Van der Geest, & Reynolds Whyte, 2008; Mabaso, 2011; Nathan, 2012). By examining empathy between generations in this context, this study hopes to provide a valuable contribution to intergenerational research. Lastly, this research is important because there is a lack of research that explains how older people experience giving and receiving emotional care in the form of active listening, love, congruence, empathy and positive regard (Brandt, Haberkern, & Szydluk, 2009).

Intergenerational relations are understood as any form of contact and exchange between different generations (Wolf & Ballal, 2006). Familial intergenerational relationships refer to relationships between different generations in one family, such as the relationships between children, parents and grandparents (Vanderbeck, 2007). Social intergenerational relationships refer to different cohorts who share the same historical and social background (Brandt et al., 2009; Swartz, 2009). In this study, empathy was investigated in social intergenerational relationships because only limited research has been conducted into socially-related generations. Moreover, in this particular research context participants do not distinguish between social and familial relationships (Coetzee, 2011). In the African context, social intergenerational relationships are of particular importance because many older people in rural African areas live in multigenerational households consisting of both familial and non-familial members such as friends or distant relatives, while their children work elsewhere (Wolf & Ballal, 2006). Most of the rural areas in Africa have very limited physical resources in terms of food, education and medical care (Mayosi et al., 2009; Hope, 2009). They also experience limited formal social protection, such as nursing homes, end of life care and pensions (Coovadia, Jewkes, Barron, Sanders, & McIntyre, 2009; Curtis, 2012). All these factors contribute to older people in South Africa especially rural communities being reliant on others for care and assistance (Aboderin,

2006). The care and assistance required would ideally be the responsibility of the younger generation, but this does not always happen in practice (Mayosi et al., 2009). It is thus very important for the older generation that their social intergenerational relationships are nurtured and kept healthy (Williams & Howard, 2006). Intergenerational care consists of physical and financial elements, including cleaning, shopping, preparing food and financial support (Brandt et al, 2009), social elements such as elderly care, health care services and special needs services (Coovadia, et al., 2009; Curtis, 2012) and also of emotional elements such as love, unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathy (Szydlik, 2008). Empathy is therefore seen as an inseparable part of emotional care that develops in any caring relationship (Kirman & Teschl, 2010). It is thus expected that empathy will emerge as a theme in studies on care and, more especially, in studies on care within relationships.

Empathy is defined as the growth of the affective imagination, namely the ability to enter into an understanding, through taking on and experiencing the feelings of others (Goldman, 2006). This is done by imagining the possible thoughts and emotions they might be experiencing and responding appropriately (Huckvale, 2011). Empathy requires people to reflect on how they have felt and been responded to in similar situations (Huckvale, 2011). Empathy in intergenerational relationships essentially means to put oneself in the position of a member of the other generation (Biggs, Haapala, & Lowenstein, 2011). It implies analyzing another person's reality and, based on this analysis, to essentially experience the other person's world (Goldman, 2006). It is to see and feel with the other person by temporarily becoming the other, to borrow his or her perceptions and interpretations and then return them after effectively understanding that person's situation (Juujärvi, 2003; Hill, Watson, Rivers & Joyce, 2007).

The Self-Interactional Group Theory (SIGT) gives an applicable explanation for the presence of empathy in intergenerational studies. It holds that relationships between people are continuous, reciprocal interactions informed by the subjective experiences and the relational

qualities between members at a specific time in their relationship (Roos, in press). Relational qualities include unconditional acceptance, congruence and empathy, among others (Roos in press; Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 2011). Bengston and Schrader's (1982) well known intergenerational solidarity theory also sheds light on the presence of empathy in studies on intergenerational relationships. This theory posits that the affective elements of a relationship such as emotional closeness between generations, characterized by care and empathy, are important relational constructs that need to be present in order to promote intergenerational well-being (Wood & Liossis, 2007). The intergenerational solidarity theory proposes a structural way of measuring and examining the interaction of the elements of intergenerational solidarity within relationships that can lead to the loss of valuable data on individual experiences (Winkelby, Cubbine, & Ahn, 2006). Currently, researchers are beginning to realize the importance of also investigating the individual as a subjective entity with personal attributes within the intergenerational system (Lüscher, 2002). This is done in order to acquire a better understanding of the in-depth experience of each individual (Lüscher, 2002). The structural and subjective elements should thus be connected (Lüscher, 2002). In this study intergenerational solidarity theory was used to provide a background understanding of the fundamental value of empathy within caring intergenerational relationships while SIGT theory informed this study to explain the subjective experience of individuals in the group by breaching the gap left by intergenerational solidarity theory (Roos, in press).

A review of literature has also revealed that true empathy consists of numerous identifying elements (Elliott, Bohart, Watson, & Greenberg, 2011). First, empathy consists of a listening element that emphasizes the importance of listening rather than responding. This allows one to better understand the other person's situation (Bodie, 2011). Consequently listening is the active process of attending to the other person so as to receive, interpret and understand information (Bodie, 2011). Empathetic listening involves being motivated and

stimulated to attain an understanding of another person's world and responding with verbal and non-verbal feedback (Elliott et al., 2011).

In essence, true empathy contains the element of accurately understanding and meaning to understand another person's thoughts and feelings in such a way that they can be repeated, described and expressed accurately (Elliott et al., 2011). This is done with the aim of acting in accordance with the understanding achieved so that well-being may be promoted (Pettersson, 2011). Empathy contributes to healthy, beneficent intergenerational relationships that are essential for community and psychological well-being (Kirman & Teschl, 2010; Stout, 2005).

Various studies on the value of empathy indicate that empathetic relationships are characterized by lower levels of anxiety and stress, minimal aggression, increased mutual understanding, more autonomy and self-appreciation, increased social competency, adjustability and less physical pain and illness (Meier & Brawley, 2011; Stout, 2005). Ultimately people with empathetic abilities are often better listeners and maintain good open communication with other generations (Decety & Ickes, 2009). Rogers (1986) emphasized the importance of empathy in relationships. He believed that every person had the underlying potential to lead a positive, productive and self-actualizing life if the seed carrying this potential is nurtured through healthy relationships. He maintained that three attributes were essential in creating a positive climate for relational growth: congruence, unconditional positive regard and accurate empathy. Rogers saw an empathetic environment within relationships as crucial for growth (Corey, 2012).

A lack of empathy, on the other hand, could be described as judgemental; or as a self-centered position of analyzing situations solely from one's own perspective (Lardén, Melin, Holst & Langström, 2006). This lack of empathy has been reported as contributing to selfishness, violence, bullying, aggression, stress, isolation, frustration, mistrust,

miscommunication, not acknowledging the other relational party, and unwillingness to make compromises (Hargie, 2011; Morisson & Downing, 2007).

Research indicates that older people who do not experience empathy in relationships with the younger generation feel unsafe, hurt, misunderstood and uncared-for (Gorden, 2003). Moreover, the younger generation has also reported feeling misunderstood and overlooked in intergenerational relationships without empathy but with a concomitant lack of interest from the younger generation in maintaining relationships with the older generation (Biggs et al., 2011).

Empathy in social intergenerational relationships is particularly significant to older people in a community (Huinink et al., 2010). It has been suggested that empathy as an attribute could be applied to deal with challenges between older and younger generations that have to compete for physical and emotional resources in an ever-growing older population or in a resource-deprived environment (Biggs et al., 2011). Besides competing for resources, older and younger generations also experience relational challenges because they find themselves in different and challenging developmental stages (Biggs et al., 2011).

In intergenerational research it is thus imperative to understand the developmental stages of the different generations in order to comprehend the dynamics of their relationships. The participants in this study were older than 60. According to Erikson's life stage theory, they fall into the maturity developmental stage (Erikson, 1982). During this stage, the focus is on accepting life and reflecting on it in a positive manner. It is also associated with the passing down of wisdom to younger generations and thus achieving life satisfaction and worthiness (Erikson, 1982). Previous studies on these two groups indicated that older people feel estranged from adolescents because they believe the younger people just want their freedom and have no respect for traditional values and elders' teachings (Ferreira, 2011; Roos, 2011). It was also reported that older people experience the young as self-absorbed and reckless because they engage in sexual activities at a very young age, consume large amounts of alcohol and get

involved in gangs (Alber, Van der Geest, & Reynolds Whyte, 2008). The focus on middle adolescence (around 16 years of age) is important because previous research has indicated specifically that the relationship between late adolescents/young adults and older people is extremely negative and is met with ambivalence from both sides (Mabaso, 2011). Older people experience feelings of discomfort, expressed as frustration and fear, in relation to younger people (Nathan, 2012). This results in unsatisfactory relationships for both generations (Roos, in press). It also appears that the tensions between these two generations are often sustained across generations and this is not always observable from behaviour, attitudes and emotions, but is part of subjective underlying experience that comes forward in dialect (Alber et al, 2008). It was therefore decided to focus in this study on people in the middle-adolescence developmental life stage. According to Marcia (1966), middle adolescence encompasses the years in which the formation of identity occurs. This is also a stage marked by rebellion in the struggle to establish one's unique identity in a community (Erikson, 1950; Whitmire, 2000).

Consequently, it is evident that the rural African context provides a unique intergenerational situation offering valuable insight into how empathy manifests in challenging environments, with special reference to the developmental challenges of older (60+ years) and younger people (16-years). It is thus imperative to focus this study on empathy and to ask the question: How does empathy manifest in older peoples' experiences of giving or receiving care in relation to middle-adolescents? The results of this study can thus usefully assist in planning and implementing interventions that aim to resolve the challenges faced in these intergenerational relationships.

Methodology

Research Method and Design

An explorative and descriptive study was conducted in order to understand and describe the underlying meanings, perceptions and experiences of older people in regard to empathy.

This study also has a qualitative nature because the research perspective was to gain an in-depth understanding of intergenerational care. The qualitative approach provided a base from which empathy could be understood and explored from the point of view of the beliefs and personal feelings of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2009). Empathy was identified as a recurrent theme in the overarching study and the decision was made to focus this study specifically on empathy (Bordens & Abbot, 2008; Howitt, 2010).

The study follows an interpretive descriptive research design, a strategy that describes a universal experience of empathy by articulating, enlightening and disseminating knowledge about empathy that lies between fact and estimation (Thorne, Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2003). It provides the basis for exploring perceptions of empathy by using theoretical constructs to derive at understanding experiences in the community and specifically those of the older generation (Thorne et al., 2003). Description provides grounding for the conceptual linkages that become apparent when attempting to locate the particular, such as empathy in this study, within the general experiences, beliefs and feelings of the community, thus locating the subjectivity of experiences within the commonly understood (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003).

Research Context and Participants

This study formed part of a research project that is situated within North-West University's WIN project, which was conducted in Vaalharts, an area of South Africa near Jan Kemp Dorp in the Northern Cape Province. The project aimed to investigate the socio-cultural context in the rural Vaalharts areas by using qualitative research strategies to acquire an in-depth understanding of the different socio-cultural dimensions. It is vital to understand the socio-cultural context because it influences the overall functioning and well-being of the community (Dennefer, 2010). The project involved different contexts, interactions and individuals in order to thoroughly investigate the manifestation of relationships, behaviour, contexts and processes within this community.

Vaalharts was identified as a socio-economically vulnerable community by North-West University and forms part of its WIN project, which aims to assist struggling rural areas (Coetzee, 2011). Socio-economically vulnerable communities are continually exposed to stressors and lack the means to cope with them (O'Brien, 2004). These communities experience a limitation of physical and emotional recourses because of multiple environmental challenges including high unemployment (as high as 50 per cent of the youth between 15-24 years) (Rankin & Roberts, 2011), high levels of disease, decreasing environmental resources, HIV and AIDS, climate change, globalization, lack of food, limited education and changing political landscapes (Casale, Drimie, Quinlan, & Ziervogel, 2010).

A purposeful sample was drawn from rural Vaalharts residents (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Pre-determined selection criteria relevant to the research objective of studying intergenerational relationships from the perspective of older people were used. This implied that only residents aged 60 and older of the Vaalharts rural villages, which include Valspan, Ganspan, Sekhing and Pampierstad could participate in the research. Eighteen participants between the ages of 60 and 85 and who were primarily Setswana-speaking but could also communicate well in Afrikaans participated in the research. Of these, 8 participants, 1 man and 7 women, participated in the Mmogo-method® and 10 participants who were not part of the Mmogo- method® (4 men and 6 women) participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Research Procedure

Consent was obtained from Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences in the North-West University (NWU-00053-10-S1) to conduct this research as part of the WIN-project in Vaalharts (Coetzee, 2011). Access to the community was obtained by the gatekeeper, who was part of the WIN-project initiative and had an established relationship with the community members. She invited prospective participants from the villages of Valspan, Ganspan, Sekhing and Pampierstad to join in the current study. They were informed about the

planned research, what it entailed, where it would take place and when they would be formally invited to participate. The gatekeeper gave an introductory overview of the aim of the study and interested participants gave their contact details to be contacted.

The participants were required to attend a 2 hour data-gathering session in a community hall in Vaalharts. Transport was made available and participants were provided with refreshments at the beginning and end of each session to accommodate the physical needs of the older participants. They were told about the aim and rationale of the research and the value of their participation. They had the opportunity throughout to ask questions about procedure or to raise any concerns. Before the process began each participant was asked to fill in an informed consent form in which he or she consented to taking part as required for the study. Consent was discussed with each participant individually to ensure that all understood clearly what would be expected of them. The participants were seated in a group and were told about their involvement and the objective of the study. They were asked to make visual presentations in accordance with the Mmogo-method®, which uses projection to gather layered research data (Roos, 2012). The Mmogo-method® is a particularly valuable instrument in a cross-cultural environment and for accessing data about abstract concepts (Roos, 2008; 2012). The participants were each presented with a bucket that contained clay, sticks and beads. They were asked to make a visual presentation of their experience of care related to the younger generation. The question was formulated broadly to allow participants to focus on giving or receiving care and to allow for an inductive investigation. After they had completed their presentations the participants were asked to discuss what they had constructed and how it related to their experience of care.

On the following day semi-structured interviews were conducted. The 10 participants in these interviews were asked to discuss their experience of care for and from the younger generation as well as specific situations in which they experienced or did not experience care for and from younger generations. They were also asked to give their own definition of care. This

was done to give the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their own experiences and to obtain in-depth understanding of their idea of care. From these interviews rich data on underlying elements of empathy emerged (Creswell, 2007).

Data Gathering

Mmogo-method®. The Mmogo-method® is informed by symbolic interactionism theory, which holds that people's perspectives on social reality is diverse and subjective and that meanings are created in the interactions between people and the environment (Blumer, 1969; Roos, 2012). The researcher needs to explore the process by which meaning is developed and the nature of meanings as represented in interactions between or among the participants (Jeon, 2004). This means that by using the Mmogo-method® the researchers became acquainted with the participants' unique social world and the specific meaning that they associate with care for and from the younger generation. The Mmogo- method® helped to uncover emotional elements of care, such as empathy, that can be difficult to express but form part of the participants' own subjective experiences. Diverse social perspectives on the reality of care also imply different meanings associated with care and consequently it was valuable in this research to use the Mmogo-method® to uncover the participants' unique understanding of care in order to achieve a better understanding of the role of empathy in these caring relationships (Jeon, 2004).

The Mmogo- method® was applied as described in the procedure; the process of building the visual presentations was completed in about 45 minutes. The researchers and the participants asked questions about the visual presentations to establish the relationship between the elements built and to better understand why certain elements were constructed or left out. The evaluation of the relationships between the elements created thus provided a better understanding of the participants' own intergenerational relationships.

The Mmogo-method® is usually applied in cross-cultural data-gathering because it helps to cross cultural gaps which are sometimes difficult to do by using verbal techniques only. Some cultural elements lie in the participants' subconscious and can only be seen in their visual presentations. It is possible that some elements of care in the intergenerational relationships of these participants are culturally specific and therefore considered to be common knowledge. The method used assisted in gaining deeper insight into the participants' social life experiences, behaviour and perceptions (Roos, 2008; 2012).

Semi-structured interviews. Ten participants who were not included in the Mmogo-method® took part in the semi-structured interviews. They were purposefully selected and asked by the gatekeeper to attend. In semi-structured interviews the questions are open-ended and thus do not limit participants' choice of answers (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). The purpose is to provide an environment in which the participant can discuss the topic in detail (Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were best suited for this research because they gave the participants the freedom to be in control of the discussion, and the researcher options to guide the interview in a detailed discussion to ensure that all aspects of care (physical and emotional) could be discussed (Laforest, 2009). Participants were asked to speak about how they experienced care, whom they cared for and received care from, and how they thought effective care should be. When the participants answered and discussed these areas the researchers verified their answers by making sure they had understood what was implied by the answer. The interviews allowed sufficient time for participants to elaborate so that in-depth data about care could be collected, but in consideration of the age of the participants all interviews were concluded in less than an hour.

The participants' discussions during the Mmogo-method® session and semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed into textual data. The visual

presentations made during the Mmogo-method® session were photographed and analyzed along with the textual data.

Data Analyses

Thematic analysis: Phase 1. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the original data on care gathered from the interviews and conversations of the participants to determine patterns. The first step is the coding of the transcribed data, a process of highlighting an important theme or word in every individual interview and then looking for a pattern and recurrent themes (Bird, 2005). The patterns identified were compared with the original research question to determine the significance of the theme in regard to older people's perceptions on care (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Judgement and blame (the antithesis of empathy) appeared as a recurrent significant theme and was analyzed further.

Deductive category application: Phase 2. The first phase of thematic analysis uncovered various elements in the data on care that the literature refers to as elements of a lack of empathy. A lack of empathy was thus inductively identified. In order to focus this study specifically on empathy or, in this case, the lack thereof, it was decided that the data would be subjected to a deductive category application (Mayring, 2000). This data analysis method uses existing theory or research to assist in focusing the research question (Mayring, 2000). It provided predictions about empathy in this study, thus assisting in determining the initial coding scheme (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). A directed analysis in qualitative research provides a method to identify the perceptions, experiences, meanings and reality of the participants in relation to empathy by informing the analysis with theories and literature on the presence of empathy or lack of empathy in care (Patton, 2002). This second phase of data analysis used a more structured process than in a conventional qualitative approach (Hickey & Kipping, 1996). It provided a method to use existing theory or prior research into the presence

or lack of empathy to identify empathy in the coding categories (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

Visual analysis. The visual presentations the participants made during the Mmogo-method® were photographed and analyzed. The researcher analyzed them by focusing on specific objects the participants had made. Emphasis was placed on the position of the objects in relation to one another, the presence or absence of certain objects and how the objects related to the research question. This method was used to interpret conscious reflections of meaning that the participants projected (Roos, 2008; in press).

Trustworthiness

Thick descriptions were obtained by using multiple data-gathering and analyzing techniques as well as by member checking. Member checking was done by establishing rapport during the Mmogo-method® discussion and semi-structured interviews by constantly validating and confirming the researchers' understanding of the participants' experiences of care. This means that all the constructs are discussed and explained in rich detail so that no single behaviour, action or sentence can be separated from the research context. This was done in the groups during the Mmogo-method® as well as in the semi-structured interviews when the members each had a chance to tell their story and were encouraged to explain what was meant by certain statements to see if there was a connection between the different opinions of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The process of obtaining thick descriptions is described as essential in ensuring trustworthiness in the crystallization process as well as Guba's model of trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Krefting, 1991).

Credibility is a term applied to how well the research describes a reality that seems to be true, plausible and persuasive (Richardson, 2000). The researchers ensured the credibility of the research by allowing sufficient time to obtain data. This was invaluable in ensuring the detection of recurrent patterns, themes and values (Krefting, 1991). Structural coherence ensures

that there are no unexplained inconsistencies between the data and the interpretation. This was achieved by making sure that the interpretation also explained any apparent contradictions or conflicting opinions in the data (Thomas & Mcgilvry, 2011). The research procedure, analysis and interpretation were subjected to peer examination. Colleagues and faculty members with knowledge of qualitative research were consulted throughout the processes to assist in evaluation. This aided the researchers in making a deeper reflexive analysis (Krefting, 1991).

Sufficient descriptive data about the participants and the Vaalharts context was provided. This contributed to the transferability of the research in that it allows comparison with other rural African areas (Krefting, 1991). Using different researchers also limited research bias. In this study various able qualitative researchers assisted in the data gathering, analysis and interpretation processes (Ellingson, 2009). Various confirmability strategies were also applied to amplify trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All records of field notes, audio recordings, data analysis products, process notes, the research proposal and data gathering techniques were kept and re-evaluated through the research process to ensure that the interpretation represented the opinions, perceptions and meaning of the participants and not the preconceived ideas of the researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

As evident from the discussion in the research procedure, the study conforms to ethical standards for research in terms of the acquisition of relevant permission, the procurement of participants as well as the provision of informed consent to conduct the research. With regards to maintenance of anonymity and confidentiality of the responses and the ethical and responsible treatment of participants, it is important to take the following into consideration. As the Mmogo-method® is a group method, only partial anonymity could be achieved. Subsequently, this was achieved by requesting the participants to keep the contents of the group discussions the information that was discussed in the group confidential. The

participants were also informed about the advantages of and possible risks associated with participation in the study. To ensure further compliance with ethical behaviour, debriefing took place following the research session. Researchers also engaged informally with the participants while they were having refreshments. This allowed the sharing of any discomfort that the research process may have elicited in the participants. As the researchers all possess basic training in counselling, in addition to the inclusion of a clinical psychologist the research team, any discomfort could be dealt with effectively. Extreme care was taken in the gathering, handling and safekeeping of data. Only the researchers and transcribers, who were bound by a confidentiality agreement, were permitted access to the data. The data will be stored at the Potchefstroom campus of North-West University and will not be made available to the public. The data will be treated in accordance with the confidentiality agreement established with the participants.

Findings

The findings of the inductive analysis of the original research question, which asked the participants to explain their experiences of care in relation to the younger generations, indicated that care between these two generations in this community was mainly expressed in terms of physical care. Older people also described giving downward care to the younger people. The older people did not experience upward care from the young. Physical care included cleaning, preparing food and helping the young with their homework. However, the emotional aspects associated with the empathetic understanding of the other generation's need for an emotional caring relationship - characterized by understanding and positive regard - was mostly lacking. The absence of empathy as a theme was thus inductively identified. Deductive category application revealed a number of indications of a lack of empathy in the older people's perceptions of the young. This included, first, the older generation's viewing the relationship exclusively from their perspective. Second, the

presence of the young is ignored and they are, in essence, invisible to the older generation.

Third, the participants' attitude towards the younger generation was judgemental. A summary of the themes is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Absence of empathy	Linear view of the relationship
	Judgemental evaluation of younger people
	Conditional acceptance
Implications for intergenerational relations	The invisible young
	Rejection by the young
	Escalating patterns of violence
	Outsiders to assist with discipline

Theme 1: Absence of Empathy

Linear view of the relationship. Older people tend to view the relationship only from their perspective. They use their own frame of reference to evaluate the care that they receive from the younger people. One older participant expressed it explicitly: *So that they can be like me.* [Participant 1, Mmogo session]. The caring attempts of younger people are evaluated according to older peoples' evaluation. For example, the older people concluded that the younger peoples' ability to care was inadequate because, compared to their elders, they did not know how to care. The following quotes support this:

The children don't know about these things. Just the old people know [Participant 3, Mmogo session].

We are older than them, so we must take responsibility for them, so that they must tomorrow know, they must care, we show them the way [Participant 1, Mmogo session].

The younger people are expected to listen to the instructions of the older people and to comply with them: *They must listen to us* [Participant 4, Mmogo session]. This obedience is expected because the younger people had been cared for by the older people and now owed them in return: *We must teach them, they must know that their elders or mother or grandmother has been doing something. So they must know that they must take care of their mother and grandmothers, because we are doing these things for them.* [Participant 1, Mmogo session].

Judgemental evaluation of younger people. The linear view from the sole perspective of the older people is demonstrated in their views of what is right and wrong. An older man said: *They must leave those wrong ways of them* [Participant 2, Mmogo session]. The older people judged the younger people according to their own evaluation of the younger people's behaviour. They saw the young as reckless, arrogant and untrustworthy. Statements such as *children are very spiteful, they make me sick* [Participant 4, Mmogo session] and *the children don't care* [Participant 3, Mmogo session and Participant 1 interview] were used to describe the young, who were seen as untrustworthy because they could not be trusted to care for the older people, especially when were really needed: *If you are in trouble they don't care, they say 'grandma I am coming now [but] then you won't see him again* [Participant 5, Mmogo session). According to the older people, younger people are also not to be trusted to make good moral decisions on their own: *They go to the farm, when they come back they are pregnant and must have a small baby and she is still a baby herself, that is not nice, you must hold them so they can just stay with you.* [Participant 3, Mmogo session]. Besides being untrustworthy, the young were presented as cruel, mean and uncaring in the face of older people's misfortune: *If he sees us struggling, he will*

pretend not to see, he will laugh, he doesn't feel sorry for you [Participant 2 interview]. This was the older peoples' opinion of the younger generation as a whole, although there were exceptions: *My children listened to me but they are all big now, they didn't give me problems. They weren't like the people's children today.*

Conditional acceptance. Younger people would be accepted only if they behaved as the older people wishes: *If they change their manners, we will then feel nice about the children and that they care, if they just leave their wrong ways* [Participant 3 Mmogo session]. This was confirmed by another older person, who explained that unless they changed their behavior and showed care in the way the older people expected, they would not be accepted: *They must leave those ways of them and they must start listening to older people, then they will care for us and then our relationships will be better* [Participant 6 Mmogo session]. Some went as far as to say that it would be better if the youth left and went somewhere else where they could be taught manners. *The people here in Jan Kemp [town] must get a place for these children that don't obey us, that they can get manners, because they don't have manners* [Participant 3 Mmogo session].

Theme 2: Implications for Intergenerational Relations.

The invisible young. From the visual analysis of the participants' presentations it was striking to see that they had not created any visual illustration of their relationship with the young. Even more striking was the fact that not one of the participants had made a figure to represent someone of the young. The participants also had trouble in explaining their caring relationships with children younger than 16 years. Some participants said: *It is difficult to say* [Participant 2 Mmogo session]. *This children of now, I really don't know* [Participant 6 Mmogo session], and *I don't know* [Participant 3 Mmogo session]. The relationship with the young was not apparent in the first part of the Mmogo session. In their visual presentations the participants built animals and objects. They expressed their abilities to make these objects as well as the

importance of caring for animals and the land but there were no human figures that represented a relationship with a member of the other generation.

For example, one older person built a figure, pots and animals and explained the importance of caring for animals and for oneself: *The man cares for the pig, he gives the pig food, he cooks food for himself, he gets food for himself, he takes the water and throws it on the flower* [Participant 7 Mmogo session].



Figure 1. *A man caring for a pig with bowls for water and food for the animal and for himself.*

It could be possible that care between older people and middle adolescents in this group of older people are an entrenched value. Downward and upward care within a collective unit is almost without a question the ideal. For example, one of the participants explained why caring for nature and the community is so important for their people: *Where we cared for our tribe, the garden we made that we can throw something in there, that it can grow, that it can give someone tomorrow something to eat*” [Participant 8 Mmogo session].

Rejection by the young: The older people’s reprimands and teachings seemed to be rejected by the younger people because they took no notice. As one participant said: *But in this time with these children of now, you can call them and try to teach them, but they don’t listen* [Participant 2 Mmogo session]. Another participant explained that they would like the young people to go to church but that their wishes were not respected: *The problem of those children of us, they don’t listen. Sundays you fight, they don’t want to go to church, they don’t want to listen to anything you say* [Participant 6 Mmogo session]. This was affirmed by the group, with one

participant adding: *We talk to them but they don't take it to heart, they don't* [Participant 8 Mmogo session]. From the group discussion, it became clear that the older people felt a need to teach and guide the youth but that this guidance was rejected as the young did not listen and in some instances even ignored the older generation.

Escalating patterns of violence: The older generation mentioned hitting the youth, fighting or scolding them, but to no avail. As one participant explained, violence was their only tool to get the children to listen, but that it was ineffective: *If they do wrong and they come to me, I will just hit them, then they listen, but then they just do the same thing again* [Participant 2 Mmogo session]. Two other participants also said that aggression was used in conflict resolution but that it did not always work: *You will fight with them, but they still don't want to go to church* [Participant 8 Mmogo session], and *This morning I fought with them to go to school by they didn't go* [Participant 3 Mmogo session].

Outsiders to assist with discipline: The participants said that they needed other resources (people/authorities/institutions) to assist them in getting the young to obey them because they could not themselves resolve conflict with the young people. A few of the participants said that they would contact the police for help: *I call the police, I don't care that much because I call the police then they go fetch them* [Participant 1 Mmogo session], and *I just say take them to the police station and they will hit them a bit* [Participant 3 Mmogo session]. Other participants turn to their religion or church for assistance: *We can pray, we ask God to help that the children leave their ways and listen to the old people; we can pray* [Participant 5 Mmogo session]. *You go to church alone, the muruti [spiritual leader] he asks why he sees you alone and where are the children? You will ask him for help and he will say that he can't help you. What can you then do* [Participant 2 Mmogo session]. One participant asked the researchers if they could not assist them: *Can you not understand our situation; do you not have a plan for us?* [Participant 6 Mmogo session].

Discussion of Findings

SIGT theory states that relationships between people are continuous, reciprocal interactions informed by subjective experiences and relational qualities, such as empathy (Roos, in press). Subsequently, the presence of positive subjective experiences and qualities such as empathy are indicative of a healthy relationship between people. Conversely, the absence of these qualities indicates poorer relationships. The research findings, indicating a lack of empathy in the intergenerational relationships, tie in with SIGT theory as the intergenerational relationships are characterised by both a lack of empathy and negative attitudes and ambiguity - indicative of poor reciprocal interactions.

The lack of empathy in this community can have various origins, which lie outside the scope of this study. For example, research conducted into the challenges experienced in old age has indicated that declining mental health in older people can have a negative effect on their empathetic abilities and their capacity to understand others in relation to themselves (Bailey, Henry, & Von Hippel, 2008). Bengtson and Schrader (1982) showed in their intergenerational solidarity theory that affection declined most rapidly of all the elements when structural elements declined. This implies that loss of income, mobility and health, and so on, could bring about a corresponding decline in care and empathy. The reasons for the lack of empathy on the part of the older people studied is thus multifaceted.

In line with other studies in rural African communities (Mabaso, 2011; Nathan, 2012), the results of this investigation indicate that the older people in this rural community have an extremely negative view of the young. Overall, the older people's perception of the manners and behaviour of younger people was negative and judgemental. As the results indicated, they saw the young people as arrogant and even repulsive. Along with this negative view of the young, the results also indicated numerous instances of a lack of empathy in the way that older people speak about and interact with the younger generation.

The older people in this study viewed the relationship with the younger generation exclusively from their own perspective. They adopted this frame of reference as the only valid view of the relationship between the generations. In addition, the older people judged the efforts and attempts of the younger people according to the perspective of their elders and accepted the younger people only if they complied with these views.

The implications of a lack of empathy for intergenerational relationships and particularly for the way in which the care needs of older people are expressed and addressed become clear in this research. Older peoples' efforts to move closer to younger people are seriously jeopardized by the manner in which they interact with the younger people, who then move away and reject the efforts of older people to engage with them. Following the principle of circularity as set out in systems theory, rejection by the younger people could have been prompted by the older peoples' lack of recognition in expressing their experiences of care in the course of intergenerational relations (Dallos & Draper, 2010). However, this lack of intergenerational empathy from the youth in their relations with older people is also emerging from other studies (Mattes, 2012). He too found that the young display rejection of, and towards, the older generation. This is mainly because the young no longer need to rely solely on the older generation for care because they have the energy to look after themselves or can turn to other adults when assistance is needed (Mayosi et al., 2009).

There is also a pattern of escalating violence in the interaction between older and younger persons. It appears that the older people's escalating punitive and physical attempts to force the younger people to comply with their norms and rules lead to more distance and withdrawal by the younger people (Roos, in press). In a desperate attempt to control the younger people, older people resort to external resources to deal with the undisciplined young. In this research study, the older generation turned to the church, the police and even the researchers themselves to help them rectify their relationships with the youth because

violence and aggression were not effective in ensuring their compliance. Calling upon external resources and people to assist in discipline and communication in relationships is a troubling indicator of an external locus of control which has implications for older people's empathy (Biggs, et al., 2011). An inability to display empathy and to understand the beliefs, values and motivations of the other persons concerned results in an inability to communicate effectively. Consequently, instead of taking the younger generation's opinions, needs and beliefs into consideration, the older generation approached external individuals, institutions and resources to assist in enforcing their own opinions and disciplinary measures.

The results of this study correlate with previous research that identified empathy as a scarce emotional resource in vulnerable rural African communities (O'Brien, 2004). It has also been indicated that unless empathy is established between different generations in low-resourced African environments intergenerational animosity and violence can be expected to escalate at an alarming rate (Ward et al., 2012). The violence and frustration expressed by the older people towards the young in this study can thus be seen as the escalated result of un-empathetic intergenerational relationships in their community.

Implications of the findings. The research has indicated how a lack of empathy, and the implications of this, can have dire effects on the already fragile intergenerational relationships between the older generation and the young in a rural African community. If the young people continue to withdraw from relationships with the older people, due to the unwillingness of the latter to compromise through empathetic understanding, the result could be a serious neglect of the older generation by the young. It is thus vital that this vicious cycle of a lack of empathy – both of the young towards the older generation (through rejection) and of the older generation towards the youth – be broken. This could be achieved if interventions that focus on improving empathetic abilities between generations are implemented in this community. The importance of these interventions being implemented

in a timely and effective manner is increasing because the intergenerational violence in this community could be an indication of escalating problematic relationships between generations. If these intergenerational problems are not addressed and mended by means of restored intergenerational empathy the risk exists that the inter-dependent older generations and the youth will drift apart irrevocably.

Limitations and Recommendations

There are some limitations to this study that should be taken into consideration. It is regretted that the perceptions of the young in regard to their relationships with older people could not be considered. It is recommended that further studies include the young persons' perspective and that this study be repeated in other rural African communities in order to generalize the findings.

Conclusion

Empathy has been identified as a scarce commodity in some low- resourced rural areas and this was also seen in this study. The older people were unable to understand the position and motivation of the young, and their behaviour illustrated this inability. The older people explained that they resorted to violence or appealed to external resources to assist them in communicating with the youth. This clearly indicates an absence of empathy and the implications of this lack contribute to a distancing in social intergenerational relationships between the older and younger generations in this community. Older people are reliant on younger people for care and assistance and alienation from the young can have dire effects on the older generation's physical and emotional well-being. Older people are also faced with a difficult developmental stage which can reduce their ability to show and experience empathy. It can be concluded that unless these older people are helped to enhance their empathetic abilities, their quality of life will decrease immensely and valuable community contributions that stem from their acquired wisdom will be lost.

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CRITICAL REFLECTION

Although intergenerational relationships have been the focus of sociology research for many years, it is only recently that the psychological aspects of these relationships have evoked the interest of researchers (Kuehne, 2013). Multiple reasons underline this new-found interest and include the rising number of older people throughout the world (Roos, 2011). This is as people are living longer due to better medical care, and shorter later-life periods of illness (Bloom, Canning & Günther, 2010). This results in more than a billion older people older than 60 having to co-exist in one community environment with multiple other generations and presents a number of challenges, which include sharing community resources (Bloom et al., 2010; Klasena & Woolard, 2008).

It was decided to focus this study on the psychological aspects of intergenerational relationships as part of a holistic, integrated study on intergenerational relationships done by the North-West University in Vaalharts. This was done specifically as the psychological aspects in intergenerational relationships present a new, emerging field of study. The demand for intergenerational research that focuses specifically on how community needs can be met by developing psychological community resources was confirmed in a recent study by Bohman, Van Wyk and Ekman (2009). They implied that this kind of research would help improve community functioning and younger people's perceived negative attitudes towards older people (Bohman et al., 2009).

Stack, Serbin, Enns, Ruttle and Barrieau (2010) also stated that healthy intergenerational relationships between older and younger generations could be very beneficial in meeting community needs, especially in low-resourced areas, and that much more scholarly research is needed here. Careful research and evaluation play a very important role in developing intergenerational programmes that focus on developing and sustaining beneficial intergenerational relationships (Stack et al., 2010). Other researchers

even go as far as to say that intergenerational research has the potential to become the building block of strong communities (Kuehne, 2013). It is thus evident that research such as that conducted in this study is not only essential for enhancing community health but is becoming a necessity when addressing generational challenges in communities.

It is also worth mentioning that, although certain similarities exist between different communities studied and their respective intergenerational relationships, there are specific challenges that arise in each individual community. The challenge for low -resourced African communities in relation to the growing aged population is not only to provide protection and care for older people; it is also to maintain their involvement in a changing society. South Africa has an elderly population (60+ years) of 6.6% (Aboderin, 2011). The South African old age-pension is very often the only financial support for the extended family in South African black communities, where the majority of poor people reside (Mayosi et al., 2009). Daily life in rural African communities is often characterized by a constant lack of basic resources like food, access to hospitals and education and also of emotional resources such as empathy (Aboderin, 2011; Mayosi et al., 2009), and unsafe conditions such as high crime rates. This increases the need for intergenerational support specifically, because interaction with different generations represents an important part of life of the aged as well as care of the aged (Bohman et al., 2009). In focusing on relationships from the perspective of older people this study on intergenerational research addresses this need.

It was decided to concentrate in this study even more specifically on empathy as a psychological element in intergenerational relationships. Empathy is identified in research as being a rare but vital commodity in low-resourced environments (Lowenstein, 2007; O'Brien, 2004). Empathetic intergenerational relationships are characterized by lowered levels of anxiety and stress, minimal aggression, increased mutual understanding, greater autonomy and self-appreciation, increased social competency, adjustability and less physical pain and

illness (Meier & Brawley, 2011; Stout, 2005). A lack of empathy on the other hand can have dire, distancing effects on intergenerational relationships. It leads to an inability to understand another person's perspective which in turn results in a lack of adequate emotional responses to another person's behaviour and emotions (Ritter, Dziobek, Preißle, Rüter, Vater, & Fydrich, 2011).

Empathy is crucial more specifically in the African community because the older generation sees itself as a group situated in between 'the old time' and 'the new time' and often does not understand the ways of the young today (Aboderin, 2011). In the African context, traditionally older people occupy an important role as bearers of culture and have been responsible for guiding younger family members (Bohman et al., 2009). Younger people in the African context are moving away from the traditional way of thinking and are increasingly trying to establish their own individuality (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Mattes, 2012). This and various other factors have been reported in research as to animosity erupting between older (60 years and older) and younger generations (16 years and younger) in the African community (Ferreira, 2011). The African context thus provides a valuable field in which to investigate empathy.

The results provide a valuable new contribution to intergenerational research in low-resourced African communities. There is a lack of intergenerational research employing visual data-gathering methods that can show the consequences of perceptions clearly, especially if there is a language barrier (Mannay, 2010). The use of the Mmogo- method® assisted in showing a clear indication of evidence of a lack of empathy in this specific rural community from the older people towards the younger generation. This affective lack leads to certain negative implications for this community, such as an inability of the older people to communicate with the young, and, in their turn, rejection of the older people.

The results showed that there is a pressing need for the older people to enhance their empathetic abilities in order to re-establish healthy relationships with younger people. The results provide a basis from which interventions can be planned to focus specifically on empathy in these relationships. These interventions could be aimed at addressing a lack of empathy that if neglected could lead to further distancing and even alienation between two generations that are in fact heavily co-reliant.

Conclusion

This study provides a valuable contribution to literature on intergenerational relationships. It broadens the understanding of the inner workings of intergenerational relationships in the rural African context and sheds light on the important role that empathy can play in enhancing these relationships. This study also contributes the use of the visual Mmogo- method® that gives a clear view of participants' experiences of empathy and thus also a clearer view of the lack of empathy in this community. The greatest value of this research is that it can be used to implement interventions in these communities that have the potential to enhance empathetic abilities in the older generation. In doing so increasingly beneficial intergenerational relationships might be established both for the younger and the older generations and, in the words of Kuehne (2013), strong, self-efficient communities be built.

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