

# **Exploring play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province: Caregivers' experiences**

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## Permission to submit

Letter of permission

Permission to submit this article for examination purposes

I, the supervisor, hereby declare that the input and effort of Ms T Prinsloo in writing this manuscript reflects research done by her on this topic. I hereby grant permission that she may submit this article for examination in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister in Social Work in Play Therapy.



.....  
Dr L Wilson

Supervisor

## Declaration of language editor

### DECLARATION

I, Clarina Vorster (ID: 710924 0034 084), Language editor and Translator, and member of the South African Translators' Institute (SATI member number 1003172), herewith declare that I did the language editing of the Dissertation of T Prinsloo (student nr 22114823) from the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.

Title of the dissertation: Exploring play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province: Caregivers' experiences.

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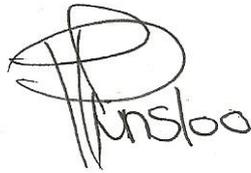
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## Declaration

I, Tania Prinsloo, declare herewith that the dissertation entitled: **Exploring play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province: Caregivers' experiences**, which I hereby submit to the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, is my own work and that all references used or quoted were indicated and acknowledged.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'P' followed by the name 'Prinsloo' in a cursive script.

Date: 14/11/2015

## Preface

- This dissertation is presented in article format as indicated in Rule A.13.7 in North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus Yearbook and according to the guidelines set out in the Manual for Postgraduate Studies of the North-West University.
- The article comprising this thesis is intended for submission to the *Social Work/ Maatskaplike werk*.
- The referencing style used for Section A and C is in accordance with the NWU Harvard reference style as set out in the North-West University Referencing Guide. The referencing in Section B was according to the Harvard reference style as stipulated in the journal guidelines (see Appendix 3).

## Summary

To play, which is every child's right, is affected by various factors such as the child's age, community, culture, background and environment. Children living in poverty stricken communities in South Africa are faced with various challenges such as a lack of resources, violence and drug abuse. Play of children residing in these communities are influenced by environmental and community factors. Limited information is available on play in poor communities, where most of the research was developed in and is more applicable in a Western context. South Africa takes on a more "non-Western" historic context. This research was important as there is no literature available on children's play in a specific community in the North West Province. To render effective services in a unique country such as South Africa it is required to take into consideration a child's distinctive background. Professionals rendering services to children from a poor community can utilise these findings to gain greater understanding of children's play and the constraints affecting play in poor communities. This study, therefore, focused on exploring the experiences of caregivers' regarding play of their middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province, South Africa. Eighteen participants (four men and fourteen women) voluntary participated in this research. The sample size was not determined beforehand, but was based on data saturation. The participants were selected through the use of purposive and snowball sampling where certain inclusion criteria was taken into consideration. Data was collected through three focus group sessions (six participants per group). Additional data collection methods such as collages and field notes was also utilised in this study. A question guide was used to facilitate the process especially when the conversation stagnated. Thematic analysis was used to allocate different themes and subthemes to the data. To ensure trustworthiness of the research process, guidelines suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were applied.

The research resulted in the finding that there are different types of play in the community such as physical play, sport, imitation/fantasy play as well as rhythmic play. Caregivers had similar experiences when it came to the types of games children in the community play. It was further found that although the children do not have commercial toys they keep themselves busy with handmade toys which highlighted

the creativity of children in this community. It was evident that various factors (such as the environment, the impact of technology and culture) influence the children's play. Conflicting experiences came to the fore when the caregivers highlighted supportive structures for children in the community, a few of the participants were of opinion that there are some or enough whilst others felt that the community has a great need for more supportive structures. Lastly, certain constraints in the community which influence their children's play (e.g. poverty, resources, safety and supportive structures) were emphasised. It was found that a child's direct environment, the poverty in the community as well as the child's cultural background affect how and with what children in this community play.

From the findings of this study it was concluded that children in this community have unique games which can be explored through further research. It was also found that there is a lack of resources or that the resources in the community hold various safety hazards for the children. Caregivers also have a need to become more engaged with their children in play. These caregivers, however, stated that they do not always have the time, therefore, more projects or supportive structures involving play will be beneficial in poor communities.

*Keywords:* Play, middle childhood children, poor community, caregivers' experiences

## Opsomming

Om te speel, wat elke kind se reg is, word beïnvloed deur verskeie faktore, insluitend die kind se ouderdom, gemeenskap, kultuur, agtergrond en omgewing. Kinders wat woonagtig is in armoedige gemeenskappe in Suid Afrika staar vele uitdagings in die gesig soos 'n gebrek aan hulpbronne, geweld en dwelmmisbruik. Speel van kinders wat in die gemeenskappe woon word beïnvloed deur omgewings- asook gemeenskapsfaktore. Dit blyk dat beperkte inligting beskikbaar is ten opsigte van spel in arm gemeenskappe, die meeste navorsing is ontwikkel in en is meer van toepassing in 'n Westerse konteks. Suid-Afrika neem 'n meer "nie-Westerse" historiese konteks in. Hierdie navorsing is belangrik, aangesien daar geen literatuur beskikbaar is rakende kinders se spel in 'n spesifieke gemeenskap in die Noordwes Provinsie nie. Om dienste aan kinders te lewer in 'n unieke land soos Suid-Afrika is dit nodig om 'n kind se eiesoortige agtergrond in ag te neem. Professionele persone wat dienste aan die kinders in 'n arm gemeenskap lewer kan hierdie bevindings benut om in 'n groter mate begrip van kinders se spel te verkry, asook om die beperkings te identifiseer wat spel in arm gemeenskappe affekteer. Hierdie studie ondersoek die versorgers se ervarings met betrekking tot spel van hul kinders in die middel kinderjare in 'n armoedige gemeenskap in die Noord-Wes Provinsie, Suid Afrika. Agtien deelnemers (vier mans en veertien vrouens) het vrywillig deelgeneem aan hierdie navorsing. Die steekproefgrootte is nie vooraf bepaal nie, maar is gebaseer op data versadiging. Die deelnemers is gekies deur die gebruik van 'n doelgerigte- en sneeubal steekproeftrekking waar sekere insluitingskriteria in ag geneem is. Data is versamel deur drie fokusgroep sessies (ses deelnemers per groep). 'n Vraaggid is gebruik om die proses te fasiliteer, veral wanneer die gesprek stagneer het. Tematiesse analise is gebruik om verskillende temas en sub temas te identifiseer vanuit die data. Om vertrouenswaardigheid van die navorsing te verseker, is riglyne voorgestel deur Lincoln en Guba (1985) toegepas.

Die resultate van hierdie navorsing het bevind dat daar verskillende tipes spel in die gemeenskap voorkom, insluitend: fisiese spel, sport, nabootsing /fantasiespel asook ritmiese spel. Daar het soortgelyke ervarings van die versorgers na vore gekom wanneer dit kom by die tipe speletjies wat kinders in die gemeenskap speel. Daar is

ook verder bevind dat, alhoewel die kinders nie kommersiële speelgoed het nie, hulle hulself besig hou met handgemaakte speelgoed wat die kreatiwiteit van die kinders in die gemeenskap bevorder. Dit was ook duidelik dat verskeie faktore (soos die omgewing, die impak van tegnologie en kultuur) kinders se spel beïnvloed. Konflikterende ervarings het na vore gekom toe die versorgers ondersteunende strukture vir kinders in die gemeenskap uitgewys het, sommige deelnemers was van mening dat daar 'n paar of genoegsame ondersteunings sisteme is, terwyl ander gevoel het dat die gemeenskap 'n groot behoefte het aan meer ondersteunende strukture. Laastens, is sekere beperkings (soos armoede, hulpbronne, veiligheid en ondersteunendestrukture) in die gemeenskap beklemtoon as faktore wat kinders se spel beïnvloed. Daar is bevind dat 'n kind se direkte omgewing, armoede in die gemeenskap, sowel as kulturele agtergrond van die kind sal beïnvloed hoe en met wat kinders in die gemeenskap speel.

Vanuit die bevindinge van hierdie studie is dit duidelik dat kinders in die gemeenskap unieke speletjies het wat ondersoek kan word deur verdere navorsing. Daar is ook bevind dat daar 'n gebrek aan hulpbronne is, of dat die bestaande hulpbronne in die gemeenskap verskeie risiko's vir die kinders se veiligheid inhou. Aandag moet geskenk word aan hulpbronne in arm gemeenskappe om te verseker dat kinders veilig is gedurende spel. Versorgers het ook 'n behoefte om meer betrokke te raak by hul kinders deur middel van spel, maar noem dat hulle nie altyd die tyd het nie, dus sal meer projekte of ondersteunende strukture wat speel behels voordelig wees in arm gemeenskappe.

*Sleutel woorde:* Speel, middel kinderjare, armoedige gemeenskap, versorgers se ervaring

## **SECTION A**

### **PART I: ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

#### **1. Introduction and problem statement**

Play, is described as a universal phenomenon of children around the world (Russ & Niec, 2011:3). The importance of play and recreation in the life of every child has long been acknowledged by the international community, as demonstrated by the commitment in the 1959 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child. It stated that children 'shall have full opportunity for play and recreation' and that 'society and public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right' (United Nations, 2013:3). This commitment was further strengthened in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which explicitly recognises the rights of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities and free and full participation in cultural and artistic life (United Nations, 2013:3).

The Committee of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child raised certain concerns about the difficulties faced by particular categories of children in the matters of enjoyment of play and in the circumstances of equality. These are the rights defined in article 31, which especially focuses on the rights of girls, poor children, children with disabilities, indigenous children and children belonging to minorities (United Nations, 2013:3). Furthermore, profound changes in the world in which children are growing up in are having a major impact on their opportunity to enjoy the rights entrenched in article 31 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In their paper Children's' rights to play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide Lester and Russell (2010:ix) wrote that there are many different and often contradictory explanations of the nature and value of play. According to Lester and Russell (2010:x) play in the lives of children worldwide is about creating a world in which, for that specific moment children are in control and can seek out uncertainty in order to triumph over it. In play the physical movement, voices and language are exaggerated, incomplete or in the wrong order. Storylines become unpredictable, random and fantastical, conventional behaviours are inverted or

subverted and the rules of the game are changed to allow play to continue (Burghardt, 2011:12). It is important for children to play as it has many different functions (Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009:23). In daily life children communicate through play, they express their emotions and worries in play, and they also develop many abilities such as learning to handle their emotions (Andrews, 2012:86). Children can develop their fine-motor skills and their verbal communication will improve through play (Russ & Niec, 2011: xi; Schaefer, 2010:4). Play is, according to Milteer and Ginsburg (2012:205), also essential to develop social and emotional ties.

Barker *et al.* (2009:6) state that South Africa not only draws upon a 'non-Western', majority world context, but presents a picture of children's play that retains an ambivalent relationship with a worldwide view to play. Children's experiences of play are affected by their local neighbourhoods/community or by the households in which they reside (Barker *et al.*, 2009:7). Pellegrini *et al.* (2013:3) state that play arises within extended social contexts, such as neighbourhoods, communities and cultures. According to Ellis (2011:71-72) children play within the culture in which they are raised. Their cultural values affect the play environments, and these environments affect the frequency of specific forms of play across culture (Papalia *et al.*, 2009:269; VanFleet *et al.*, 2010:9). The culture and environment in which children grow up will also have an effect on their play behaviour. Pellegrini *et al.* (2013:1) emphasize that when working with children, their environment must be taken into consideration. Children in rural areas and children from low socio-economic communities for example tend to have different toys to those of children in urban areas (Louw & Louw, 2014:278). In other words, to reiterate, while play is globally associated with childhood, the forms and values of play varies significantly across communities (Guest, 2013:15). The cultural context and family environment in which the child develops cannot be ignored because it will influence the way they learn, the games they play and how they act towards other children (Papalia *et al.*, 2009:12-13; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008:105). Children's ability to find time and space for play is affected by a range of social, cultural, economic and political factors (Ginsburg, 2007:184; Lester & Russell, 2010:ix). These include gender, socio-economic status and disability. Although it may not be possible to isolate play from other areas of deprivation in children's lives, their ability to engage in play is significantly reduced in situations of severe stress (Burghardt, 2005:124).

Severe stresses that children encounter include violence, fear, discrimination, child abuse, excessive academic pressure, poverty, loss of security and family support, unsafe or toxic environments, as well as food and water shortages.

From the above it is evident that children's experiences of play are affected by different factors in their community. The children, living in a specific poor community in North West Province, are faced with different challenges, in turn affecting both their play and consequently their development. These children are exposed to poverty, mainly due to a lack of employment of their parents. Many people in this community are affected by or infected with HIV and AIDS. Sexual-, alcohol- and child abuse are also factors that influence children's healthy functioning in this community. According to Van Deventer (2014) several of these children have lost their parents due to illnesses such as HIV and AIDS or gang violence. A vast amount of the children's parents in this community have been imprisoned and can't provide or take care of their child or children. Therefore, these children have to live with relatives or an adult who will be able to support them. This is the major reason why caregivers will be included in the study and not only the parents of children in their middle childhood. Loper *et al.* (2014:225) describe caregivers as grandparents and/or other relatives serving as parents for children whose own parents are unable to care for them. Sometimes the arrangement is an informal, private arrangement between the parents and relative caregivers; in other situations, the child welfare system is involved.

Van Deventer (2014) and Mogongwa (2015), who have both been involved in this community for over ten years, stated that many of these households in this community do not have the finances to repair their houses and sometimes they do not have any food to put on the table. For the purpose of this study a poor community will according to the Fact Sheet 5 of the Youth Group (2011) refer to a community where caregivers struggle to meet the basic needs of their families, where high unemployment rates emerge, residents show signs of malnutrition and caregivers/parents do not have sufficient funding to send their children to school. This specific community forms part of a suburb situated seven kilometres North West of Potchefstroom. This community was constituted spatially in 1969 when residents under the Group Areas Act were removed from the former William Klopperville (Jansen van Rensburg, 1985:31-32).

Discrimination based on race and apartheid are core features in the origins and history of this community.

The researcher, as a social work student, was for the past four years involved in this specific community through rendering community services to the community. The involvement focused mostly on the children in the community which included playing and activities which are helpful for cognitive, social and physical development. Approximately three times per month, the researcher would visit a ministry, which serves as an after care for children in the community. Children from ages 3 to 13 attend the ministry after school receiving help with their homework and these children are involved in activities to occupy and better them. These activities include playing under supervision until their caregivers return home from work. This particular ministry renders services to more than 60 children on a daily basis. There are only four registered crèches in the whole community but various informal non-registered crèches exist. Most of the families live in RDP (Reconstruction and Development Program) housing with one or more small shacks on the property which they rent. According to Van Deventer (2014) the community has only two recreational facilities which consist of a swimming pool and a multipurpose sport centre. Recreational facilities for children such as play parks are non-existing. The community is divided into areas and consist of 10 smaller areas. Most of the roads in the community are unpaved and most of the residents in this community make use of public transport to get around.

During this involvement the researcher became aware that the community consists of a diverse population and that children in this community do not always have toys or play parks with play apparatus to keep them busy after school and on weekends. Children in this community often have to design their own toys to play with and create games with their own rules limited to the resources/materials they have access to. According to Mogongwa (2015) caregivers will sometimes guide children to play games that they played when they were younger, but are sometimes too busy to play with their children. But as time passed, the way children play also drastically changed.

The focus of this study was on children in the middle childhood which is defined as children between the ages of six and eleven (Papaplia *et al.*, 2009:284). According to

Louw and Louw (2014:277) by six years of age most children's thought processes become more logical and realistic and fantasy and pretend play give way to seeing the world more realistically. They also state that children in their middle childhood start enjoying play activities and games that involve structured rules. Although they still enjoy elements of fantasy, the logic in games and play now becomes the focus of their interest. Early childhood children, furthermore, enjoy playing by themselves and their solidarity activities are usually the main focus of a child's play spectrum (Louw & Louw, 2014:210) where adolescent' play is more focused on technology and cyberspace, and they do not show a lot of interest in playing outside or imaginative game playing (Louw & Louw, 2014:373-374). According to Louw and Louw (2014:226-231) children in this age group have developed physically, emotionally, cognitively and academically and therefore they now have a better understanding to make more independent choices, for example by deciding what sort of games they like or dislike.

As literature regarding play is currently more focused on Western perspectives, the relevance of these Western perspectives, in a South-African context, is questionable given the country's unique background. Therefore the problem exists that little is known about how middle childhood children in poor communities play, and play being the words of the child and play being used in communicating with, interviewing children as well as a therapeutic tool in Social Work, this knowledge is very important in Social Work with children. Therefore the necessity to explore play of children in this specific poor community as not much is known about the play of children in this poor community. Given the importance of play in the lives of the young, it should arguably occupy a prominent place in research. The study therefore aims to, not only develop knowledge, but also to provide a basis for future studies. Only a few studies with minor similarities could be found. Yousef and Ener (2014) focused on multicultural considerations of play, whilst Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) addressed issues that may deprive children who live in poverty from gaining the maximum benefits from play. None of these studies have the same aim as the proposed study, therefore, the need to explore this topic was identified. The findings of this study will also contribute to learning more on how caregivers experience their children's play in a poor community. A professional field which work directly with children's play is the field of play therapy, as play therapy is a developmentally appropriate practice modality used to work with

children (Landreth, 2012:83). Play is used within therapy to provide children the opportunity to express, explore, and make sense of their own experiences within a dynamic relationship with a counsellor (Association for Play Therapy, 2011). Play therapy is used to address different issues or render specific therapeutic services to children in diverse types of communities and is simultaneously growing in popularity but lacking in evidence (Kay, 2009:5). In order to effectively provide play therapy services to children from specific poor communities or communities where the children are exposed to poverty etc., it is essential to explore play of middle childhood children in this community. This research therefore did not seek to solve a problem, but to gain an understanding of how middle childhood children in poor communities, in a specific context, play. Explorative studies in local contexts develop knowledge by providing an added impetus to this specific research topic.

## **2. Research question, aim and objectives of the study**

A research question is a concise, interrogative statement developed to direct a study (Grove *et al.*, 2013:708). Thus the research question that provided a framework and boundaries for this study was: “What are caregivers’ experiences regarding play of middle childhood children in a poor community?” The aim of this qualitative research was to, through an explorative descriptive design, explore and describe the experiences of caregivers with regard to play of middle childhood children, aged 6 to 11, in a poor community in the North West Province, South Africa. The mentioned research methodologies were used to achieve the following objectives i) to explore and describe play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province through the eyes of the caregiver ii) to make a positive contribution to the broadening of literature in the field of play through learning more on how caregivers experience their children’s play in a poor community.

## **3. Concept definitions**

### **3.1 Play**

The word play has various definitions and is complex to describe, but the fact that it is purposeful cannot be ignored (Andrews, 2012:10; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008:86-98).

In addition, play is also an excellent means of communication among children, as well as between a child and an adult (Smith, 2010:5). For the purpose of this study the definition of Axline (cited in Brems, 2002:248) is used; this definition best describes play stating that it is the most natural medium for a child with regard to self-expression.

### **3.2 Middle childhood children**

The focus of this study will be on children in their middle childhood. Middle childhood is defined as the age between six and eleven (Papalia *et al.*, 2009:284; Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:218).

### **3.3 Poor communities**

According to Writer (2015) South Africa (SA) faces the “triple challenge” of poverty, inequality and unemployment. SA’s wealthiest 4% of households receive 32% of total income, while 66% of households receive 21% of all income. According to Nicolson (2015) and Writer (2015) more than half of South Africans live below the national poverty line and more than 10% live in extreme poverty, i.e. on less than (R15.85) per day. Another way to assess the socioeconomic status of a community is through the eight item Basic Necessities Scale (BNS) where it measures the poor household access to necessities (Wright, 2008). This scale was developed from the South African Social Attitudes Survey and it identifies basic household items that families are unable to afford- food, toiletries, clothes, school uniforms, equipment and fees (Pillay, Roberts & Rule, 2006). In this study the focus will be on a community in the North West Province where, according to Mogonwa (2015), most parents/caregivers live under the above mentioned poverty lines and struggle to provide adequate food and non-food items to their families and children.

### **3.4 Caregivers**

Loper *et al.* (2014:225) define caregivers as grandparents and/or other relatives serving as parents for children whose own parents are unable to care for them. Sometimes the arrangement is an informal, private arrangement between the parents and relative caregivers; in other situations, the child welfare system is involved. The definition of Loper *et al.* (2014:225) is used to define caregivers in this study.

## **4. Research methodology**

### **4.1 Literature review**

According to Fox and Bayat (2007:35) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:336) a literature review is a critical assessment and summary of the range of past and contemporary literature in a given area of knowledge so that gaps can be identified. Through the literature review relevant literature was critically examined which enabled the researcher to identify what is already known about the research topic as well as to become aware of possible gaps or weaknesses in the field (Whittaker, 2012:24).

The following search engines were used to access scholarly academic journals, thesis and dissertations and books. Databases like EBSCO Host, One Search, Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, Google Books, CatSA and Psych Lit were used to identify applicable literature. Literature sources were gathered in the Ferdinand Postma Library and the researcher received support from the subject specialist. Referencing of the literature was managed through using refworks. Literature about theories of play (Drewes *et al.*, 2011:11; Ellis, 2011:1-22; Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010:1-29; Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009:20-28), poor communities as a concept and play therapy (Scalzo, 2010:5-12; VanFleet *et al.*, 2010:11-19) was explored. Shank (2006:98) points out that the way qualitative researchers choose to conduct their literature study will not only depend on their topic, but also on their approach.

### **4.2 Research paradigm, approach and design**

An interpretive research paradigm (Howitt, 2010:7), was used to address the main research question. An interpretive paradigm is a view of social science, or a lens through which the practice of research is examined, Cohen, Manion & Morrison cited in Maree & Van der Westhuizen (2007:32). According to Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:37) interpretivism is based on the assumption that there is not one reality but many and, therefore, the study was done in a natural context to reach the best possible understanding. The interpretive paradigm, furthermore, allows for the reality that the world is interpreted through the mind and is constructed by different viewpoints through different processes of observation, and that it places an emphasis

on experience and interpretation (Henning *et al.*, 2004:20). With regard to the interpretive research paradigm there was a focus on exploring a social phenomenon which in this study is the play of middle childhood children in a poor community.

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have (Merriam, 2009:13). A qualitative approach was followed in this study as this focused on exploring a social phenomenon (Howitt, 2010:7), which in this study is the play of middle childhood children in a poor community. With qualitative research the researcher aimed to make sense of the real world and, therefore, saw the importance to study the perceptions of the caregivers in their natural setting (Denscombe, 2010:272-273, Silverman, 2013:11). Qualitative research were gathered because it elicits participants' interpretations of meaning, experience or perception. It also produced descriptive data in the participants own spoken words (Fouché & Delport, 2011:6; Rossman & Rallis, 2012:5-10). As this study focused on exploring caregivers' experiences of play of middle childhood children in a poor community, an explorative descriptive design was appropriate. The explorative descriptive design, added by Thorne (2010:1626), was used to describe interpretively what was learned and understood of a specific phenomenon that was studied. This type of design was utilised as it engages both the "how's" and the "what's" of social reality. It concentrates on how people construct their experiences and in the configuration of meaning that shape and inform their reality- constituting activity (Holstein & Gumbrium, 2005:484).

Exploratory research, which was used in this study, is according to Blaikie cited in (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95) used when gaining insight into a situation, community or individual. Neuman (cited in Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96) describes exploratory research as the first stage in a sequence of studies. The answer to a "what" question would constitute an exploratory study. Basic research was used in this study, as according to Fouché and De Vos (2011:94), basic research is not concerned with solving the immediate problems of the discipline, but rather with extending the knowledge base of the discipline. Therefore, the researcher wanted to explore and describe caregivers' experiences of play of middle childhood children in a poor community to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

### **4.3 Context of the research**

According to StatsSA (2011:1) 51.25% of the residents living in the specific poor community is Coloured, 47.78% Black and a very small percentage of the residents are Indian, White or Asian. There were 16125 residents in 2011 according to StatsSA (2011:1) of which the majority are children in their middle childhood and adolescents. According to Mogongwa (2015) there have been an increasing number of black residents moving into the community. As time passed, the community divided into 10 smaller areas, which still form part of this one community. It was also shown that 54.82% of the residents were Afrikaans speaking (StatsSA, 2011:1).

### **4.4 Participants**

The population of this research study includes caregivers of children, in middle childhood, living in a poor community in the North West Province. As it was not possible to use all the caregivers of children in middle childhood in a poor community, sampling was used to select the participants for the study.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study, due to the fact that each subject in the sampling frame will not have an equal chance of being selected for this study. According to Daniel (2012:87) purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure where participants are selected from the population on the basis of their suitability with the aim of the study and as well as the specific inclusion criteria. The specific inclusion criteria for the sampling in this study were the following:

- Caregivers (such as a child's aunt, uncle or grandparent/s who take the responsibility to look after the child because the mother and/or father are not able to support the child anymore) of a child or children in their middle childhood.
- Any caregiver of a child in the middle childhood who resided in this poor community and met the above mentioned requirements, had the opportunity to participate in the study.
- The child or children must have been living with caregiver/s.

- The caregivers must have been able to attend the sessions with the researcher that took place as arranged with the caregivers beforehand, and they had to be willing to be audio taped.
- The caregivers must have been able to speak Afrikaans, English or Setswana. A translator was available for participants who speak Setswana.
- Caregivers had to participate voluntarily in the study and be willing to sign a written informed consent form.
- Participants were not excluded based on age, race, language or gender.

Snowball sampling was utilised, as participant assisted sampling, to approach participants for the final focus group where the researcher approached participants that were already included in the study and gained information on other similar persons that could also be included in the study (Strydom, 2011a:233). The researcher carried on selecting participants until data saturation was achieved.

There was collaboration with the gatekeeper, which acted as a community advisor, to obtain participants. The aim and purpose of the study was discussed with the gatekeeper, who is a pastor in the community. The gatekeeper also lives in the community and was the person who assisted the researcher to make contact with the members of the community. The gatekeeper assisted the researcher in identifying possible participants for this study, was the direct link with the participants and ensured that the participants understood the research process. The gatekeeper furthermore assisted with regards to the venue for the focus group meetings as well as kept the researcher informed on any questions or uncertainties the participants might have. All the possible participants that were interested to partake in the study were invited to an orientation session. During the orientation session the aim of the study was explained and consent forms were handed out to the potential participants. The consent form was written in the potential participants preferred language and was written in order to ensure that the potential participants understood the process of the research clearly. The potential participants had the opportunity and time (approximately three days) to examine the consent form and hand it back to a central point (the church where the orientation session was held). Most of the participants felt comfortable signing the consent form and handed it in on the day of the orientation session.

See Table 1 for information regarding participants that participated in the research.

**Table 1: Focus groups' compilation**

<b>Focus group</b>	<b>Gender of participants</b>	<b>Children's ages</b>
Focus group 1	5 females; 1 male	8,6,9,7,8,7
Focus group 2	5 females; 1 male	11,7,11,10,7,10
Focus group 3	4 females; 2 males	8,6,6,10,9,7

#### **4.5 Data collection**

In qualitative research, interviewing is the dominant mode of data collection where researchers collect information through direct interchange with either individuals or a group that possess knowledge that are desired for research purposes (Greeff, 2011:342). Various types of interview methods can be utilised by researchers to gather data which include one-to-one-, semi-structured-, ethnographic-, e-mail-, telephone- and focus group interviews. (Greeff, 2011: 347-361). Focus groups were used as interviewing method to collect data to gain insight into caregivers' experiences regarding their children's play.

##### **4.5.1 Focus groups as interviewing method for data collection**

Focus groups were used as interviewing method for data collection (Greeff, 2011:360). According to Krueger (cited in Greeff, 2011:361) focus groups can be defined as a carefully planned open discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a non-threatening environment. Focus groups seems an appropriate method of data-collection for this study, as according to Thomas (2009:169) focus groups provide a method to get a better understanding of how people experience or think about an issue. In this study it was aimed to understand the experiences of caregivers with regard to play of middle childhood children in a poor community. Participants were selected because they had certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of this study. Focus groups was found the best method of data collection because according to Nieuwenhuis (2007:90) group interaction is useful in widening the range of responses, activating forgotten details of experience and releasing inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing

information. The participants were able to build on each other's comments to provide an in-depth view which cannot always be attained from individual interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:90). This method also encouraged group dynamic assisted in data generation. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007:90) group dynamics become an integral part of the procedure with participants engaged in discussion with each other rather than directing their comments solely to the researcher. This was the case in all three the focus group meetings where the participants fully engaged in discussion with each other. The researcher only gave guidance and asked questions when the participants did not have anything else to add to a topic.

The following steps were followed in utilising focus groups as a method of data collection:

- Three focus group meetings were held and after the third focus group meeting data saturation was obtained. Morgan and Krueger (cited in Greeff, 2011:367) state that conducting too few focus group meetings may result in something being missed or even lead to premature conclusions, but on the other hand doing too many is a waste of money and time.
- Six participants were included in each of the focus groups. Greeff (2011:366) states that focus groups usually include six to ten participants and everyone can then be allowed to participate, while still producing a range of responses.
- The focus group meetings were held at "Jesus Loves You Ministries" which is situated in a central part of the community and easily accessible to the participants.
- All the participants were informed and given directions to the church.
- The focus group meetings were held on a day and time convenient for the participants and were finalised when all the participants for the study were identified.
- Confidentiality was explained to the participants and it was emphasised that only partial confidentiality can be ensured. Privacy was ensured by using an area in the church where it was private and nobody else had access to.
- The verbal interaction of the participants in the focus group was audio recorded and transcribed.

An interview schedule (question guide) was designed that contained non-leading questions that assisted the researcher when the group discussions stagnated (see Appendix 2). This interview schedule was developed through consulting with experts in the field, then evaluated through pilot testing and adjusted accordingly.

#### **4.5.2 Collages as data collection method**

In addition to the utilisation of focus groups in gathering data, as described in section 4.5.1, collages were used (see Appendix 5) to provide the participants the opportunity to express their understanding of play in their community in another way. According to Vaughn (2005:16) collages can be utilised as an additional data gathering method and is seen as a creative method of data collection. This was used as an additional data gathering method which provided the participants with the opportunity to express themselves and acted as visual evidence of their unique experiences. The use of this method of data collection provided the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the caregivers' experiences. The participants were asked, in the beginning of the focus group meetings, to make a collage to illustratively demonstrate their understanding of play of their children. This was linked to the first question in the interview schedule. These collages were discussed within the group where participants had the opportunity to elaborate on what they made and how they perceived play in this community. The other questions in the interview schedule were used to facilitate and guide the discussion in the focus group.

#### **4.5.3 Field notes as additional data collection method**

Field notes were also used to gain more insight of how the parents perceive their children's play. This was done by observation and making notes of everything the researcher saw and heard even if it seemed unimportant at that time. According to Judd, Smith and Kidder (cited in Strydom, 2011b:335) field notes should consist of everything the researcher sees and hears. Initially this might seem to be uninteresting, boring detail, but the researcher is unlikely to know at the beginning of the study what might become important later on. Mack *et al.* (2005) confirm that informal conversations and interaction with members of the study population are also very

important components of data gathering and should be recorded in field notes, in as much detail as possible.

#### 4.6 Data analysis

All data gathered were transcribed and analysed. An inductive approach was followed, which means the themes identified were strongly linked to the data acquired. According to Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:37) researchers in the interpretive paradigm mostly prefer inductive data analysis, which is more likely to help them identify the multiple realities potentially present in the data. Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding framework, or adapt it to analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006:83). The focus group discussions as well as the discussion of the collages were audio recorded. For the purposes of this study thematic analysis was used. According to Braun and Clarke, (2006:79), “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.”

The steps, as seen in Table 2 and as set out by Braun and Clarke (2013:201-273), where used. Table 2 describes how these steps were applied in this study.

**Table 2:** *Steps applied in data analysis*

<b>Steps</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
Step 1: The researcher got familiar with the data	The researcher made sure that she was familiar with the data through transcribing, reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.
Step 2: Generating initial codes	Interesting features of the data were coded in a systematic way across the entire data set by hand. Data was then organised to each relevant code.
Step 3: Searching for themes	Codes were then collated into potential themes by hand.

Step 4: Themes were reviewed	The themes were checked to see if they worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.
Step 5: Defining and naming themes	Constant analysis was done to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

#### 4.7 Trustworthiness

Nieuwenhuis (2007:113) states that trustworthiness is of the utmost importance in qualitative research. In the seminal work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited by authors like Denscombe (2010:299-301); Rossman and Rallis (2012:59-62); Schurink *et al.* (2011:419-421) and there are four criteria regarding trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Firstly, *credibility* (Denscombe, 2010:297-302) was verified through member checking and data triangulation. The goal of credibility according to Schurink *et al.* (2011:419-420) is to demonstrate that the study was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject has been accurately identified and described. Member checking (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420) was used after the focus group meetings where the researcher telephonically made contact with specific participants to check if she clearly understood what was said. This was done to make sure that she understood the participant's point of view by asking if there was a match between participants' view and the researcher's reconstruction and representation of them. Data triangulation was used to ensure the credibility in this study. Triangulation according to Kennedy (2009) facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more methods of data collection (in this study focus groups, field notes and collages were utilised). Triangulation also involves the concurrent, but separate, collection and analysis of data in order to compare and contrast the different findings (Delpont & Fouché, 2011:442). This was used to test the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments and increase the chance to control, or at least assess, some of the threats or multiple causes that may influence the results. The findings obtained through the use of the different methods correlated and where found to be consistent.

Regarding *transferability*, the researcher should ask whether the findings of the knowledge can be transferred from a specific situation or case to another (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and as also cited in Schurink *et al.* (2011:420) transferability is the alternative in qualitative research to external validity or generalizability commonly used in quantitative research. According to Schurink *et al.* (2011:420) a qualitative study's generalisability to other settings may be problematic. The generalisability of qualitative findings to other settings is seen by traditionalists as a weakness in the approach. The research is narrow in its sample and applies directly to caregivers in a specific poor community. Therefore, by having achieved data saturation, it can be assumed that findings of the research are transferable to caregivers in this specific community. To counter challenges the researcher can refer back to the original theoretical framework to show how data collection and analysis will be guided by concepts and models. By doing this the theoretical parameters of the research was stated (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420).

Regarding *dependability* (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420) the researcher must ask whether the research process is logical, well-documented and audited. An audit trail was kept which provided a description of the research steps that were taken from the start of the research project, as well as the reporting of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:319). This audit trail includes the raw data (field notes, transcribed focus group meetings and collages) and data analysis notes.

Denscombe (2010:301) states that *confirmability* addresses the issue of objectivity and focus on the extent to which qualitative research can produce findings that are free from influence of the researcher. Confirmability was achieved by audio recording of the focus group meetings and transcribing the audio recordings verbatim to ensure an accurate reflection of the participants' views.

## **5. Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus (NWU-00131-14-S1) for this research project. The researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the North-West University. The main

purpose of ethical research is to protect the rights of the research participants (Babbie, 2010:128).

Permission to partake in this study was obtained from the participants through written informed consent after an orientation session was held where there was a thorough discussion about the research procedure and what was expected of the participants. All the participants were informed that their identity would be protected and that they could withdraw from the research at any time with no consequences. The focus groups were conducted within a safe environment which was easy accessible to all participants. An appropriate referral source (registered social worker/counsellor) was available for professional help to assist participants with any discomfort that could have been experienced due to the study. No participants in this study indicated that they needed professional help. Participants were informed beforehand that the North-West University would accept full responsibility for keeping and safe-guarding all collected data and that when the findings are published, all identifying information will be omitted. Once the research has been published, the digital recordings and transcriptions will be kept for a period of five years at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies, NWU after which it will be destroyed.

## **6. Choice and structure of the research article**

The dissertation follows the article format as prescribed by the North-West University.

The dissertation consists of the following sections:

- Section A
  - Part I: Orientation to the research (NWU Harvard referencing style)
  - Part II: Literature study (NWU Harvard referencing style)
- Section B: Article (Harvard referencing style)
- Section C: Summary, evaluation, conclusion and recommendations
- Section D: Appendices

Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk has been identified as a possible journal for submission.

## **7. Summary**

Children everywhere play, regardless of culture and place, and play contributes to a child's healthy development. Poverty affects numerous communities in South Africa and it is evident that poverty also has an influence on children's overall development and functioning. Profound changes in a child's world can have a major impact on children enjoying the rights highlighted by the United Nations that all children have the right to leisure and play. Children's play is affected by aspects such as the community in which they reside, cultural values, severe stress (such as living in poverty, violence etc.). With the researcher's involvement in this poor community before the study was conducted, the researcher became aware that the community consist of a diverse population and that children in this community do not always have toys or play parks with play apparatus to keep them busy. Children in this community often have to create their own toys to play with and create games with their own rules limited to the resources/materials they have access to. The purpose of the research was to explore caregiver's experiences regarding play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province.

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## **Part II: Literature study**

### **1. Introduction**

Play is globally guaranteed as an unchallengeable right of childhood (Andrews, 2012:55; Lester & Russell, 2010). This in itself reveals the importance which is placed upon play as a task that facilitates a child's growth and development (Brems, 2002:248; Ginsburg, 2007:183; Homeyer & Morrison, 2008:211; Landreth, 2002:9-10). Stagnitti and Cooper (2009:20) stated that two components can be seen as essential when trying to understand a child's play, firstly the perspective of the child doing the playing, and secondly the context in which the play occurs. Scalzo (2010:36) also stated that a child's context is of utmost importance because it lets children act in a different way. It was therefore deemed necessary to explore how middle childhood children in a specific poor community play.

### **2. Definition of play**

Play is a term commonly used and everyone has their own definition, which is mostly shaped by each person's unique childhood memories. It is therefore a concept that is rather difficult to be understood, though the clarity seems to disappear when we try to define it (Andrews, 2012:10). It is also clear that there is something regarding play that everybody feels they can relate to, but fail to define and thus the following statement by Moyles (1994:5) shows the complexity of defining play: "Grappling with the concept of play can be analogised to trying to seize bubbles, for every time there appears to be something to hold on to its ephemeral nature disallows it being grasped!" Moyles (1994:5) is of the opinion that play is not an observable moment, but a process, or series of processes, which include a series of motivations, opportunities, skills, understandings and practices.

Smith (2010:4-6) distinguishes between three different approaches in order to define play, namely the functional, structural and criteria approaches. The functional approach looks at what the purpose of the behaviour is or what it appears to be. According to the functional approach, which is most commonly used, not only one criterion is sufficient to say something is play; the more criteria are present the more



this definition: “Play, as a unique form of adaptive variability, instigates an imagined but equilibrated reality within which disequilibrium exigencies can be paradoxically simulated and give rise to the pleasurable effects of excitement and optimism” (Sutton-Smith, 2001:14). Although the aforementioned definition is incomplete, circular and very difficult to unpack, there are prominent features such as that play is inimitable, that it takes place in an imagined reality and that it is marked by pleasing effects that include optimism (Eberle, 2014:219).

Stagnitti and Cooper (2009:22) define play by saying it can be conceptualised as activities that are chosen by the child and it focuses on the intrinsic motivation of the child to engage in the activity. Axline (cited in Brems, 2002:248) is of the opinion that play is the most natural medium for a child with regard to self-expression. In addition, it is also an excellent means of communication among children, as well as between a child and an adult.

A definition of play is preferred that takes into consideration its dynamic character, the above mentioned definition of play of Axline (cited in Brems, 2002:248) is seen as most suitable for the purpose of this study. In the above section play is defined and the next section focuses on the elements that are present in play.

### **3. Elements of play**

Garvey (cited in Ray, 2011:5) describes five elements of play, namely play must be pleasurable, have no extrinsic goals, be spontaneous and voluntary, involve active engagement by the participants and contain an element of imagination. These elements build a view of play as a fun activity with little purpose evoked by the player. VanFleet *et al.* (2010:3) concur with Garvey, stating that play is a process chosen freely and is enjoyable to those who engage in it. As seen in the above statements, it can be acknowledged that play consists of more than just a fun activity that children do to occupy their time. Scalzo (2010:35-36) adds to these elements by stating that play is said to often involve creativity, flexibility, risk taking, curiosity, adaptability and problem solving. VanFleet *et al.* (2010:3) state that children who play choose the content and purpose of their actions, follow their own instincts, ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons.

Eberle (2014:219, 222) identifies the genres of play as humour, skill, fantasy, risk, contest and celebrations, all of which are selective imitations of paradoxical variability; he, furthermore, suggested that there are six basic elements which is present in children’s play. The following table (Table 3) will help to clarify the six elements. It is important to note that play is not a linear process but Eberle (2014:222) is of the opinion that these six elements can emerge to cover the field of play.

**Table 3:** Elements of play

<b>ELEMENTS</b>					
<b>Anticipation</b>	<b>Surprise</b>	<b>Pleasure</b>	<b>Understanding</b>	<b>Strength</b>	<b>Poise</b>
interest	appreciation	satisfaction	Tolerance	stamina	dignity
openness	awakening	gratification	empathy	vitality	grace
curiosity	arousal	joy	knowledge	drive	ease
desire	thrill	delight	skills	passion	fulfilment
<b>wonderment</b>	<b>astonishment</b>	<b>fun</b>	<b>mastery</b>	<b>creativity</b>	<b>balance</b>

As seen above there are various elements that can be present when a child plays and this contributes to play being so complex to define and describe. Each element takes on a descriptive power as it subdivides into further expressions and synonyms of varying strength. Scan the columns of the table downward to see how a single element increases in intensity until it reaches the words written in bold at the bottom of the table (wonderment, astonishment, fun, mastery, creativity and balance). It can also be that play begins in anticipation but can move to the elements such as enjoyment, understanding (where children can master certain skills through play) or helping children to recognise their strengths. Another element is that play helps children to build self-confidence (poise), which can cause a child to be balanced. In the previous section the emphasize was on the elements of play and the next section focuses on the various types of play.

#### 4. Types of play

Several theorists have done research with regard to the existing types of play. They did so by observing and categorising the range of activities seen when children are considered to be at play (Andrews, 2012:31). The categorisation of play encourages a deeper consideration or understanding of what children are doing when they play, and from Hughes' (National playing fields association, 2000) findings a very comprehensive list was compiled (Andrews, 2012:31-32). Prior to this carefully compiled list of Hughes, many professionals used the acronym SPICE (Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative and Emotional play) to describe the types of play, but realised that many play activities can consist of a lot more than just the above mentioned types (Andrews, 2012:32). Hughes (cited in Andrews, 2012:33) categorised 16 types of play but even this comprehensive list (as seen in Table 4 below) cannot be claimed as a definite list of all play types as others may observe play types or behaviour that is not covered in his literature.

**Table 4:** *Types of play*

Symbolic	Fantasy	Creative	Role
Dramatic	Imaginative	Rough and tumble	Socio-dramatic
Locomotor	Social	Communication	Exploratory
Problem solving	Object play	Mastery play	Deep play

This table supports the fact that children can partake in more than one type of play at the same time. For example, a child busy with social play (playing house-house with friends) can also take part in communication, socio-dramatic, creative, imaginative and fantasy play.

Smith (2010:8) is also of opinion that there is no universal agreement on the different types of play but recognises the following types of play which provides a decent overview of the different types of play. Firstly, Smith (2010:8) includes social contingency play, which refers to simple games for example peek-a-boo, where there is enjoyment in the responses of others which is often contingent on the behaviour of one person by another. Secondly, sensorimotor play which refers to activities typical

of Piaget's sensorimotor period, which is up to about two years. It will most likely refer to activities with objects (or one's own body) and are based on the sensory properties of the objects, for example sucking. Thirdly, object play is where children take part in numerous activities with objects and can also be referred to as construction play, for example fitting lego blocks together. Fourthly, children play with sounds, words or phrases which are referred to as language play like babbling, rhyming verses or repetitive statements. Fifthly, physical activity play, which in general refers to gross bodily movements. Physical activity plays consist of two forms which are exercise play, like running, crawling or jumping and then rough-and-tumble play which is an energetic social form of physical play involving wrestling, kicking and chasing one another. The last type of play which is highlighted by Smith (2010:9) is fantasy or pretend play which is characterised by nonliteral use of objects, actions or vocalisation where a child can imagine that a block can become a cake. A more complex version of pretend play is that of socio-dramatic play, where it involves role play where more than one person participates.

Papalia *et al.* (2009:265-269) identify four types of play, stating that children of different ages have differing styles of play, with an assortment of objects and varying amounts of time. The four types of play consist of functional play, constructive play, dramatic play and formal games with rules (Papalia *et al.*, 2009:265-267). It was found that as children get older (8-13 years), their play tends to become more social, more interactive and more co-operative (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010:24). At first children play alone, then alongside other children and finally together (Papalia *et al.*, 2009:267). As can be seen above, although there are different opinions regarding the types of play, there are also various similarities with regards to how different theorists recognize the different types of play. The type and extent of children's play can be seen to be shaped by numerous factors, where some of the most influential are the time available for playing, contemporary socio-economic factors, suitable space and play objects (Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009:21). Although different types of play are identified, the importance of play is highlighted.

## **5. Importance of play**

According to Ginsburg (2007:183) play is essential for all children to develop socially, cognitively, physically and it can increase the emotional well-being of children. Therefore, although play can be seen as merely an activity that children enjoy, there are far more benefits that a child can gain through play that will be briefly described below. Behaviour that expresses fundamental patterns that are important for an individual's overall functioning, are emphasized through children's play (Henricks, 2014:196; Runcan *et al.*, 2012:795). Children develop intellectually, creatively, physically, socially and emotionally through play (Dfes, 2007:7; Ginsburg, 2007:183; Huisman, 2014:13). Duncan and Lockwood (2008:28) state that play provides a context for children where there is freedom from the pressure to perform and that this allows them to be more intellectually adventurous. It, furthermore, develops learning processes and skills in such a way that children function beyond their normal level of operation. The following aspects viewed by Duncan and Lockwood (2008:91-95), furthermore, highlights the importance of play: Play allows children to learn actively as it engages both body and brain and draws on all the senses; it supports children in the development of concepts and ideas as it allows children to make connections and build on concepts in different cognate areas simultaneously; furthermore, it supports children's learning regarding their environment and their culture; children's social interaction and social development is also supported by play; play supports children's emotional development and help children develop self-regulation; it, furthermore, enables children to integrate everything they know in order to understand new learning; finally, it provides an excellent opportunity for adults to support learning. It is therefore evident that play has a very important role, not only for a child's development, but it also adds value to other aspects of a child's life. Play also has certain benefits for children, which are discussed in the next section. Thus, there are many influences and no single truth relating to the importance of play and the way that it constantly develops and changes (Andrews, 2012:55).

## **6. Benefits of play**

Children's play has a very important role in the overall (physical, cognitive, socio-emotional etc.) development of a child (Biddle *et al.*, 2013:257; Catron & Allen,

2007:45; Eberle, 2014:217; Ginsburg, 2007:183; Huisman, 2014:466) and can be beneficial to a child’s overall development (Andrews, 2012:77; Hughes, 2010:107; Lester & Russell, 2010:13). It is not merely a supporting activity that encourages learning and development but rather the basis of development that determines how the child grows and develops (Andrews, 2012:28; Catron & Allen, 2007:48). Play holds several benefits that have been researched by different theorists (Biddle *et al.*, 2013; Catron & Allen, 2007; Lester & Russel, 2010; Smith, 2010) such as the development of motor skills, expression of emotions, vocabulary growth etc.

Some of the main benefits that play offers children according to Biddle *et al.* (2013: 267-268) are listed in Table 5 and can be found in most research done regarding the benefits of play (Duncan & Lockwood, 2009; Ginsburg, 2007; Smith, 2010).

**Table 5: Benefits of play**

Development of motor skills	Vocabulary growth
Sharpening of senses	Increased concentration
Expression of emotions	Flexibility
Sharing- turn taking- harmony	Role taking
Ordering and sequencing	Expansion of imagination
Delay of gratification	Increase the level of creativity

The above table demonstrates that, through play, children build important knowledge which include developmental domains which assist children to develop language skills, learn important roles, establish relationships, self-expression, relaxation and to express their feelings (Andrews, 2012:83; Biddle *et al.*, 2013:267). Now that it is evident that play holds numerous benefits, especially with regard to a child’s development, the different developmental domains and the impact play has on each (physical, cognitive, socio-emotional and self-regulation) of the domains needs to be considered.

## **6.1 Physical development**

A major characteristic of play is being active for example, through jumping, dancing, throwing, running and generally moving around, which can strengthen gross-motor

development (Biddle *et al.*, 2013:73; Tahmores, 2011:2273). This physical play, according to Andrews (2012:83-86), leads to physical development and provides children with the ability to do things which require muscle strength, and muscle control or dexterity. It may, furthermore, assist in enabling children to develop the ability to continue to use their muscles for a long period of time; therefore, they are combining and refining those skills. Although play is also an enjoyable activity for the children, it holds secondary benefits like developing muscles or motor skills which can help the child to partake in physical activities apart from play. Smith (2010:39) states that children can be motivated to keep physically active through exercise and rough-and-tumble play. Shaffer and Kipp (2014:586-587) state that one of the major causes that currently negatively influences children's physical play, is technology and especially television. The aforementioned authors are of the opinion that watching television is an inherently inactive action that is less likely to assist children to burn excess calories, than physically active play. A child's physical play can, furthermore, be seen as a source through which other areas can also be developed (Lester & Russell, 2010:102). For example, if a child can master running or climbing onto high apparatus, the child will be able to explore. The benefit will therefore not just be a physical benefit, but they also use their cognition (remembering the path that they have taken), can engage with other children socially on the playground and can be exposed to other developmental aspects because of their physical development gained through playing (Smith & Thelen, 2003:44). Andrews (2012:85) supports this by stating that the development systems of children are interconnected and the physical movement of a child is linked to other aspects of their development.

## **6.2 Cognitive development**

Play contributes to a child's cognitive development which was proven by results found by Tahmores (2011:2273). This study indicated a positive correlation between play and a child's mental development such as improving problem-solving abilities, broadening a child's thinking patterns etc. Ginsburg (2007:183) also adds that play contributes to the development of healthy brain development. Shaffer and Kipp (2014:570) found that play became more and more cognitive complex with age. There is a relationship between the cognitive complexity of a child's play and the child's social

competence with peers, for example, children who's play was more complex at any given age than that of their peers, were found to be more outgoing and pro-socially inclined (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008:51). Tahmores (2011:2277) found that play and even the types of toys that children are exposed to, can result in increased mental and social development of children.

### **6.3 Socio-emotional development**

According to Andrews (2012:19) play holds many benefits for a child's social and emotional development. Development in these areas can help them form friendships and relationships (Lester & Russell, 2010:19). Play is not merely used for the expression of interests, but also an expression of affect where children tend to work out feelings in play (Hendricks, 2014:191). Play, furthermore, serves as a medium for children to express feelings that might not be allowed for them to express in their family, for example, a child is not allowed to shout at their parents when they are angry but in play the child can use two dolls to shout at each other (Brems, 2002:250). Brems (2002:250) emphasizes that the expression of feelings is a very important component of play as it not only allows catharsis of emotions, but teaches the child that affect should be expressed freely and that it can be controlled through expression and can be manageable when expressed.

Scalzo (2010:35) also highlights the importance of play as means of communication but that it can also serve as a promoter for the forming of social relationships. It was through the work of Mildred Parten where a model of socialisation skills in play were introduced (Andrews, 2012:87; Biddle *et al.*, 2013:269; Papalia *et al.* 2009:267).

### **6.4 Self-regulation and development of the self**

Children learn about themselves, others and their worlds through play (Homeyer & Morrison, 2008:211). It is viewed by Hendricks (2014:208) that play is a distinctive pathway for the construction of the self where the person while playing, takes particular elements of the world and turns them into something different from what they were before. Through play a child can begin with a rudimentary definition of self, where play

acts as a facilitating agent that helps the child to express themselves freely. This self-expression includes a component of self-exploration (Brems, 2002:250).

Play has been related to children's physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and motor development (Lin & Yawkey, 2013:245). Different research studies address the significant role of play in children's learning and development. Children play in different ways according to the developmental stage in which they are.

## **7. Play of middle childhood children**

### **7.1 Physical play in middle childhood**

The focus of this study is on children in the middle childhood which is defined as children between the ages of six and eleven (Papalia *et al.*, 2009:284). Learning of and refinement of various psychomotor skills, are one of the most prominent developmental characteristics of children in the middle childhood (Louw & Louw, 2014:241). These skills develop because of increase in power, coordination and muscle control. At this stage of a child's development children enjoy play activities which involve a lot of body movement and participation in sport activities (Henricks, 2014:206-208).

### **7.2 Play becomes more structured**

According to Shaffer and Kipp (2014:218) by six years of age most children's thought processes have become more logical and realistic, and fantasy and pretend play give way to seeing the world more realistically. Children in the middle childhood start enjoying play activities and games that involve structured rules (Biddle *et al.*, 2013:269). Although they still enjoy elements of fantasy, the logic in games and play now becomes the focus of interest (Sobel, 2002:12). Furthermore, Cook and Cook (2010:108) state that most children's thinking patterns and cognitive development will become more logical and realistic as they enter the concrete-operational phase (ages 7-11 years) which falls in the middle childhood. Therefore, according to literature (Papalia *et al.*, 2009; Shaffer & Kipp, 2014) children in this stage will partake in activities and games that have more structure or rules and they will begin to move away from fantasy play. Even though they still allow elements of fantasy to be involved

in their play, the logical parts of the games (rules and order) they play become more important with age. Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is that during middle childhood children are more likely to begin to gather or collect certain material (i.e. marbles, cards, dolls, etc.) and they are constantly looking for strategies to improve their collection for example through negotiation and exchange (Louw & Louw, 2014:293).

### **7.3 Play and peer group**

Middle childhood children are more likely to engage during play in interaction with other children of the same gender and age (Louw & Louw, 2014:290). As can be seen, children in middle childhood have a high regard for forming lasting friendships and this can also influence the way they spend their free time. Children in their early childhood enjoy playing by themselves and their solidarity activities are usually the main focus of a child's play spectrum, while later, in the middle childhood, the child's peer group becomes more important (Louw & Louw, 2014:210). Adolescents (11-17 years) are more focused on technology and cyberspace; they do not show a vast interest in playing outside or in imaginative game playing (Louw & Louw, 2014:373-374).

## **8. Caregivers and play**

Children's healthy development is facilitated by proper nurturing relationships with reliable caregivers (Demby *et al.*, 2015:2). Parents or caregivers have the primary responsibility to meet children's needs and give them love and attention. Play allows for quality interaction between caregivers and the child, which includes interaction where it allows parents to listen in a different but productive way (Huisman, 2014:466). Heidemann and Hewitt (2010:38) state that play is a child's natural way of communication, therefore, caregivers can learn several things about their child if they make time to be involved in their child's play.

### **8.1 Caregivers experiences of play**

Lester and Russell (2010:ix) state that caregivers' experiences and attitudes towards children's play vary in the sense that some ignore it, or dismiss it as a waste of time, some curb play as something dangerous or subversive, while others see it as a

learning or social mechanism. According to Ginsburg (2007:183-184) some caregivers may desire children's play to act as a socialisation process; in reality some caregivers have a concern that play is disruptive, threatening or of no value. Caregivers need to ensure that children's physical and social environments support their play, otherwise well-being and development may be compromised (Lester & Russell, 2010:xi). Different theories and perspectives emphasise the importance of play in children's growth and that it relates to their physical and mental development (Lin & Yawkey, 2013:245; Scalzo, 2010:35). However, not all parents hold such positive ideas of children's play, nor do they necessarily know how to actively engage in play with their children (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008:157). It is also important to be aware that parents' attitudes toward children's learning and the kind of environment they provide for their children, also differs with regard to their culture, socio-economic stance and contextual background in which the child is brought up (Lin & Yawkey, 2013:250; Tahmores, 2011:2273). Therefore, the researcher explored caregivers' experiences regarding play of middle childhood children in a specific poor community.

## **9. Play in different cultures and backgrounds**

Societies that are ambiguous, original and continually changing can have an influence on how play are perceived (Henricks, 2014). The way adults from a given culture perceive play, has an important influence on several aspects, namely the interaction between parents and children, the stimulus given to the children, the availability of toys and spaces for play (Smith, 2010:91). Research has shown that parents from different countries hold distinct perceptions of children's' play and use different behaviours in interacting with children (Andrews, 2012:78; Lin & Yawkey, 2013). Lin and Yawkey (2013:241) conducted a study to gain an understanding of Taiwanese parents' perceptions of children's play, whether they value the contributions of play to children's development, and their behaviours in supporting their children's play. The study results showed that most Taiwanese parents agreed strongly that play contributes to children's development; they were willing to provide supportive behaviour in play.

Through research done by Chao (1994:78) it has been revealed that parents of different ethnicities, furthermore, have diverse perceptions of children's growth and learning. According to Lin and Yawkey (2013:245) Western countries, especially in the

Northern United States, respect children and believe children are capable of doing things and they regard each child as an independent individual. Thus, children are given a lot of freedom to demonstrate their inherent characteristics as well as natural ability (Rudy *et al.*, 1999:26). On the contrary, people from Eastern countries, such as China, Korea and Japan tend to highlight the importance of children's academic achievement (Chao, 2000:87), rather than focusing on play time.

The differences in fundamental beliefs influence perceptions of children's play. Parmar *et al.* (2004:33) compared Asian (China, Korea, Pakistan, Nepal, and India) and Euro-American parents' perceptions towards play. According to findings Euro-American parents put greater emphasis on play, provided more funny toys, and facilitated children's play by playing with their children themselves than Asian parents. Asian parents tended to be more focused on the significance of getting a head start on academics, bought more typically educational toys, and facilitated cognitive development by serving as teachers and academic coaches at home.

In similar studies Farver *et al.* and Göncü *et al.*, (cited in Lin & Yawkey, 2013:245) reported that East Indian, Korean-American, and Guatemalan mothers were more likely to regard play as a children's activity or a way to escape boredom and amuse children than American mothers. Taiwanese middle-class mothers' attitudes toward children's play was also examined and it was found that play was no longer viewed as useless. Instead, mothers believed in the contributions of play to children's cognitive, social, physical, and mental development (Pan, 1994:33). Davis and Polatajko (cited in Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009:21) found that play was something that existed thousands of years ago but the presence of and responses to different toys varied culturally and temporally.

In today's time and age, we live in an era where more commercial toys are available that can be used for educational purposes or the mere enjoyment of the child (Cleverfish, 2015). There exist false notions that for play to be effective, it must involve expensive toys, but children's creativity is enhanced with the most basic (and least expensive) toys, blocks, dolls, and art supplies (Miltner & Ginsburg, 2012:208).

In a similar study conducted by Bartie *et al.* (2015:1) the main objective was to determine play opportunities, activities, equipment, toys and the play environment for 5 to 6-year-olds living in a low socio-economic community outside a small town in South Africa, in order to understand the nature of play in this environment better. It was found that the children in this community did not need expensive toys to be able to play and find play enticing and meaningful. Play activities included singing or dancing and the use of familiar equipment found in the environment such as sand, sticks and stones. These researchers also found that it may be necessary to revise traditional play assessments in similar communities to incorporate this. Children in this community liked to play together or near each other. Many people from the community shared the responsibility of looking after the children, including the parents, grandparents, older siblings and neighbours. Children were highly imaginative in creating toy objects from their environment and treasured their toys. Participants played with very little regard for the environmental factors that surrounded them. Despite spatial limitations and limited resources, the participants experienced play as meaningful and important and made the best of what they had. These children were highly innovative and experienced play in everything they did and were able to experience joy in play by adapting the environment and the resources to fit their purposes (Bartie *et al.*, 2015:12).

The reality is that in South-Africa there are large numbers of families and communities that are affected by poverty, poor resources and many other factors that make it difficult for caregivers of children to afford expensive toys that children can use in play. In South-Africa children's diverse background and different experiences provide them with the opportunities to learn and express themselves in relation to their own unique background (Louw & Louw, 2014:259). The culture and community within which the child grows up will have a direct influence on children's play and children's play materials or toys (Louw & Louw, 2014:294). For example, children's play in a low socio-economic community will differ from children staying in an urban area (Andrews, 2012:122). Children from low socio-economic areas or communities may have more homemade or self-manufactured toys, while children from higher socio-economic areas will have access to buying toys or electronic media (Louw & Louw, 2014:294).

Therefore, as supported by the above mentioned, a child's direct environment and culture can have an influence on a child's play.

## **10. Potential influences on children's play**

There are various issues (such as parental involvement, environmental factors, socio-economic factors, etc.) that can influence children's play which is highlighted in a study conducted by Ginsburg (2007:184-185). These issues, outlined by Ginsburg (2007:184-185), may lead to various outcomes. One of the most prominent outcomes is that children spent less time playing due to the following factors:

- Some children are given less time for play as they are hurried to adapt into adult roles and prepare for the future at early stages where they have to help with household chores.
- There are more families today with single headed households or where both parents have to work and children are then forced to attend to child care, or in other settings where parents spend less time playing with their children.
- The media and other sources (i.e. parenting magazines) tend to give parents the message of what good parents are supposed to do to produce super achieving children which may lead to overburdened schedules and very high expectations of parents.
- Children are being encouraged by parents especially in today's modern time and age to start to build up a strong résumé to get a desired spot in higher education, through both high academic excellence and a wide variety of activities and volunteer efforts which reduce their time for play.
- The decrease in playing can be explained by children being passively entertained by television and computer and video games regardless of the wide variety of health and developmental benefits of active and creative play.
- In many communities children cannot play safe outside of the home due to increased violence and other environmental dangers.

Stagnitti and Cooper (2009:22) highlight the following additional factors which can also influence children's play:

- the knowledge that parents have with regard to the developmental benefits of play;
- the resources available that are dedicated for play (for example craft, construction materials, creative toys);
- parental concerns about their children's safety in what were once conventional play spaces (i.e. parks and streets) which force parents to keep their children indoors.

In order to obtain a more holistic view of play in different settings it is necessary to also consider play in different backgrounds and the effect poverty have on play.

## **11. Poverty and play**

According to May (2000) the analysis of poverty in South Africa has had a very long history. In 1922 the First Carnegie on poverty was undertaken which only focused on the "poor white" problem. It was only much later the Second Carnegie Conference that was held in 1983 examined the poverty amongst South Africa's black population and highlighted the horrendous conditions in the rural areas and townships of South Africa (May, 2000). Thus, it is evident that South Africa's history also contributed to poverty. According to Woolard (2002) South Africa can be described as an upper-middle income country, but a country of stark contrast.

According to Nicolson (2015) Statistics South Africa's (Stats SA) report uses different figures to count those living in poverty. Using the Income Expenditure Survey from 2010/11 which updated and reweighed a services after collecting data from 25 000 households, Stats SA's new poverty lines comes from a cost-of-basic-needs approach including food and non-food (Writer, 2015). This calculates the minimum amount of money you need to survive and those that fall below this line live in poverty. There are also three types of poverty lines in South Africa, namely the food poverty line (people can't purchase enough food to meet a minimum energy intake); lower bound poverty line (people don't have enough money to purchase both adequate food and non-food items), and the upper bound poverty line (people still considered in poverty but can purchase both food and non- food items). Concurrent to a wide use of poverty lines, Stats SA update these lines annually using consumer price index data, with the

latest update estimating that in 2014 the food poverty line was R400 per capita per month, while the lower and upper bound lines are R544 and R753 per capita per month, respectively (Nicolson, 2015).

Only a few studies regarding play of children living in poverty, with minor similarities with the study could be found. Yousef and Ener (2014) focused on multicultural considerations of play and in a study conducted by Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) issues that may deprive children who live in poverty from gaining the maximum benefit from play were addressed.

According to Milteer and Ginsburg (2012:210) children who live at or below poverty level, experience educational and health disparities from early childhood. These children deserve additional resources to achieve academically, foster school engagement, and develop their social and emotional competencies. Many children reside in families that face stresses related to daily survival, including whether they will have food or safe shelter, leaving less energy to focus on enrichment opportunities, including play. Some live in neighbourhoods where violence may be the norm and children playing on neighbourhood playgrounds the exception. It was evident that all children still play even if they face challenges such as poverty, violence, etc. (Mildeer & Ginsburg, 2012:211).

Bartie *et al.* (2015:10), in a similar study focusing on children in a low socio-economic community in South Africa, found that children considered large areas of the community as their playground. These children from a poor community created different ways to play, using different items and toys in their immediate environment. A lack of play infrastructure raising concerns about children's safety did not stop these children in a poor community from playing (Bartie *et al.*, 2015:10). Instead, children were innovative and created their own games with what was available, such as cricket bats from planks (Bartie *et al.*, 2015:10). Explorative studies in local context are needed to develop knowledge by providing an added impetus to this specific research topic.

## **12. Summary**

In this literature review aspects regarding elements of play, types of play, the importance of play, caregivers'/parents' perceptions of play and how play are perceived in poor communities are discussed. Regardless of their socio-economic status, all children have the right to safe places to play, during which they develop cognitive, communication, problem-solving, negotiation, and leadership skills. All children have the right to engage in safe and regular physical activity such as play that will decrease the incidence of lifelong health disparities. And, as can be seen, play contributes to the healthy development of children. It is physically and emotionally healthy children of today that will become the productive citizens who will contribute positively to society in the future. Play becomes more structured in the middle childhood and children begin to focus more on the peer group. Various aspects such as low socio-economic status, being passively entertained by television and computer and video games and the type of community that a child is raised in, have an influence on their play. Therefore, it is necessary to study parent's perceptions with regard to play in a poor community to find out how they experience play.

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## **SECTION B**

### **ARTICLE**

#### **Exploring play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province: Caregivers' experiences**

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## **Abstract**

Play, a universal phenomenon of children, is affected by the specific community and culture children live in. This qualitative study aimed, through an explorative descriptive design, to explore and describe the experiences of caregivers with regard to the play of middle childhood children, in a poor community in North-West Province. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select eighteen participants. Focus groups as interview method and in addition collages were utilised to collect data. Findings highlighted different types of play, factors which influenced the children's play and the effect of poverty, resources, safety and supportive structures on play.

## **Introduction and problem statement**

The importance of play and recreation in the life of every child has long been acknowledged (Casby, 2003; Homeyer & Morrison, 2008). Ginsburg (2007) as well as Runcan, Petracovschi and Borca (2012) add that play is essential for all children to develop socially, cognitively, physically and it can increase the emotional well-being of children. Although the importance of play is emphasized, certain concerns were raised by the Committee of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child about the difficulties certain children face in the matters of enjoyment of play and in the settings of providing equal opportunities for children to play (United Nations, 2013). These rights defined in article 31 showed that especially girls, poor children, children with disabilities, indigenous children and children belonging to minorities face difficulties with regard to the enjoyment of play (United Nations, 2013:3). The changes in the world in which children are growing up also have a major impact on their opportunity to enjoy the rights entrenched in article 31 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Play is an activity that has existed for thousands of years and it was established that the presence of different types of play, games and toys vary culturally (Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009). Although more commercial, educational and technological driven toys are available today, children do not necessarily have to be exposed to these sort of toys for play to still be effective (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). In a study conducted by Bartie, Dunnell, Kaplan, Oosthuizen, Smith, Van Dyk, Cloete and Duvenage (2015) in which play opportunities, activities, toys and the play environment were determined in a low socio-economic community, it was found that children in such a community did not need expensive toys to find play enticing and meaningful. Children in this low socio-economic community engaged in activities such as singing, dancing and also used familiar materials found in the environment for play (Bartie *et al.*, 2015).

South Africa takes on a more ‘non-Western’ type of context and therefore according to Barker, Kraftl, Horton and Tucker (2009) children’s play in this country holds an uncertain relationship with a worldwide view to play. This can be due to the fact that South Africa is such a unique country with diverse cultures and communities. In South-Africa children’s diverse background and different experiences provide them with the opportunities to learn and express themselves in relation to their own unique background (Louw & Louw, 2014). The culture and community within which the child grows up, have a direct influence on children’s play and children’s play materials or toys (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children’s experiences of play are affected by their local neighbourhoods/communities or by the households in which they reside (Barker *et al.*, 2009; Pellegrini, Hoch & Symons, 2013). They, furthermore, play within

the culture in which they are raised (Ellis, 2011; Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009) their ability to find time and space for play is further affected by a range of social, cultural, economic and political factors (Lester & Russell, 2010) and varies significantly across communities (Guest, 2013).

Children living in poor communities, such as the community in North West Province in which the research was done, face challenges regarding their safety, poverty and poor resources, which will influence their play and development. In this community there are some households that do not have sufficient finances to repair their houses or caregivers who do not have money to put food on the table. Most of the families in this community live in RDP (Reconstruction and Development Program) housing or in small shacks in the back of a property which they rent. Most of them do not have electricity or struggle to provide for their children when it comes to new clothes, stationary for school or toys. Finances for transportation to work and for children to school, are limited. Therefore, poverty, for the purpose of this study, is regarded as the main reason for caregivers' struggle to meet the basic needs of their families. Residents show signs of malnutrition, high unemployment rates emerge and caregivers do not have sufficient funding to send their children to school (Youth Group [fact sheet 5], 2011).

Poverty not only causes severe stress for adults, but children are also faced with stressors, such as worrying about having food, violence in the community etc. (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). Although poverty increases the exposure of children to these stressors or challenges, children will make time for play in the midst of difficult circumstances (Bartie *et al.*, 2015; Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). Bartie *et al.* (2015) found that these difficult circumstances do not drastically affect children's play but can sometimes even be the reason for children's improved sense of creativity.

According to Van Deventer (2014) many of the children in this specific community have lost their parents due to HIV and AIDS, gang violence or drug abuse. Some of the children's parents have been imprisoned and can therefore not provide or take care of their children. These children are then cared for by relatives or an adult who will be able to support them. Therefore, caregivers were included in this study. By this is meant that, apart from the parent/s of children, also grandparents or other relatives serving as a parent for children whose parent/s are unable to provide and care for them, were included in the research. Lester and Russell (2010) as well as Duncan and Lockwood (2008) state that caregivers/parents are primarily responsible for the provision of positive and safe conditions for their children to freely express themselves through play. Contrasting views that parents/caregivers hold regarding children's play exist,

i.e., some ignore or dismiss it as a useless activity that has no value (Ginsburg, 2007), while others experience play as valuable to a child's social, physical, emotional and mental development (Lin & Yawkey, 2013; Scalzo, 2010). Caregivers from diverse countries or even cultural backgrounds have different perceptions and experiences of children's play (Hendricks, 2014; Smith, 2010). Therefore, given the salience of play in the lives of the young it should definitely occupy a prominent place in research, especially South Africa where western perspectives of play are not always applicable given the country's unique background and composition. As literature regarding play is currently more focused on Western perspectives, the relevance of these Western perspectives, in a South-African context, is questionable given the country's unique background. Therefore the problem exists that little is known about how middle childhood children in poor communities play, and play being the words of the child and play being used in communicating with, interviewing children as well as a therapeutic tool in Social Work, this knowledge is very important in Social Work with children. Therefore the necessity to explore play of children in this specific poor community as not much is known about the play of children in this poor community. It is, furthermore, essential for professionals working with children from these specific poor communities to understand these children's play and take these children's unique way of playing and aspects influencing these children's play into consideration when working with them. Professions such as Social work, Psychology, Occupational therapy will integrate play in their work with children. These professionals need to be aware that children from this specific poor community have a unique way of playing and this can help the professionals to render more effective services. When focusing on the child and what the child knows and feels comfortable with can enhance the quality of services rendered.

### **Research question and aim of the study**

The research question that provided a framework and boundaries for this study was: "What are caregivers' experiences regarding play of middle childhood children in a poor community?" The aim of this qualitative research was, through an explorative descriptive design, to explore and describe the experiences of caregivers with regard to play of middle childhood children, aged 6 to 11, in the context of a poor community in the North West Province, South Africa.

### **Research methodology**

#### **Research approach and paradigm**

A qualitative research approach was followed in this study as the researcher was interested in understanding how people make sense of their world and the

experiences they have (Merriam, 2009) as well as to study the experiences of the caregivers in their natural setting (Denscombe, 2010, Silverman, 2013). Through using this approach, the researcher wanted to explore a social phenomenon (Howitt, 2010), which in this study was the play of middle childhood children in a poor community. The qualitative approach provided the opportunity to elicit participants' interpretations of meaning, experience or perception and produced descriptive data in the participants own spoken words (Fouché & Delport, 2011; Rossman & Rallis 2012). The interpretive paradigm (Howitt, 2010) was used which allowed the researcher to perceive the reality that was constructed by the different experiences (Henning, van Rensburg, & Smith, 2004) caregivers have regarding play of their middle childhood children.

## **Research design**

An explorative descriptive design (Thorne, 2010) was used to gain insight into caregivers' experiences. This particular qualitative research design requires the researcher to describe interpretively what is learned and understood of a specific practice situation or phenomenon being studied (Thorne, 2010). This design is centred in how people create their experiences and in the configurations of meaning that shape and inform their reality- constituting activity (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). This design seemed most appropriate as this type of design is used where there is a lack of basic information on a new subject such as in this study, play of middle childhood children in a specific community.

## **Participants**

The gatekeeper, who has been living in the community for over 20 years and is a pastor in the community, assisted the researcher to make contact with caregivers that met the inclusion criteria. The gatekeeper assisted the researcher in identifying possible participants for this study, was the direct link with the participants and ensured that the participants understood the research process. The gatekeeper furthermore assisted with regards to the venue for the focus group meetings as well as kept the researcher informed on any questions or uncertainties the participants might have. The participants in this study were sampled through the use of purposive sampling as the participants were selected from the population on the basis of the specific inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were that participants needed to be a parent or caregiver (such as a child's aunt, uncle or grandparent/s who take the responsibility to look after the child, because the mother and/or father are not able to support the child anymore) of a child or children in their middle childhood. These caregivers also needed to live in the poor community and were able to speak Afrikaans, English or Setswana. A translator was available for participants who spoke Setswana, which

eventually was not necessary, because all the participants could speak either Afrikaans or English. The child must have been living with the caregiver and the caregivers had to attend all the sessions as arranged with them beforehand. Participants were not excluded because of age, race, language or gender. Initially twelve participants (two men and ten women) were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of the inclusion criteria after which snowball sampling (Strydom, 2011) was employed where the researcher approached participants that were already included in the study and gained information on other similar persons that could also be included in the study. With snowball sampling another six participants (two men and four women) were selected to partake in the study in order to ensure that data saturation occurred.

### **Data collection**

The data was collected through three focus groups with six participants per group which was conducted at a church that was easily accessible to the participants. Each focus group meeting lasted approximately 50 minutes. During these focus groups a question guide was used which was validated with experts in the field prior to the commencement of the study and adjusted accordingly. The question guide consisted of four open ended questions. Which were the following: What do you understand by play of children? What type of play is your child involved in? Tell me about their play in the community. What do you think is the value of play? These questions served as a guideline in the focus group meetings which was used when discussion stagnated. Furthermore communication techniques were employed such as minimal verbal responses and reflection to the answers given in the focus group meetings. The participants were probed by using open-ended questions, clarification and paraphrasing to encourage more information from the participants without leading (Creswell, 2009). The interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim.

In combination with the focus groups, collages were used as a supportive method to provide the participants the opportunity to express their understanding of play in their community in a visual way. According to Vaughn (2005) collages can be utilised as an additional data gathering method which provided the participants with an opportunity to express themselves. It is also seen as a creative method of data collection. This was used as a method to open the conversation with the participants. The participants were asked, in the beginning of the focus group, to make a collage to illustratively demonstrate their understanding of play of their children. The collages were discussed within the group where the participants had the opportunity to elaborate on what they made and how they experienced play in this community, providing the researcher the opportunity to gain better understanding of the caregivers' experiences.

Field notes was also used as a supportive data gathering method to gain more insight of how the parents perceive their children's play. This was done by observation and making notes of everything the researcher saw and heard even if it seemed unimportant at that time (Judd, Smith & Kidder cited in Strydom, 2011). According to Mack, Woodson, Macqueen, Guest and Namey (2005) informal conversations and interaction with members of the study population were also very important components of data gathering and should be recorded in as much detail as possible.

## **Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse all the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a method to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data. The following steps by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed during data analysis: Firstly, the researcher got familiar with the data by transcribing the audio recordings, reading and rereading the data. Then the researcher generated initial codes across the entire data set by hand. Thereafter the researcher searched for initial themes by collating codes into potential themes. Themes were then reviewed and clear names were given to each theme.

## **Ethics**

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the North-West University (Ethical number: NWU-00131-14-S1). The researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the North-West University. Prior to the focus group sessions an orientation session was held during which the aim of the study was explained and the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions to the researcher regarding any uncertainties that they had. The consent forms were handed out to the potential participants and explained to them. The researcher gave sufficient time for participants to complete the consent forms and written informed consent was obtained from all the participants that agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. The consent form was written in the potential participants preferred language and was written in order to ensure that the potential participants understood the process of the research clearly. Initially the potential participants had the opportunity and time (approximately 3 days) to examine the consent form and hand it back to the pastor at the church. All the participants, after the orientation session, felt comfortable to sign the consent form and preferred to hand it back to the researcher on the day of the orientation session. On the day of data collection, the participants again were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they were made aware of the fact that they could withdraw from the study at any time for whatever reason without any negative consequences.

The aim of the study, in terms of what was expected of them, what the data would be used for and who would have access to the data were discussed with the participants before data was collected. The fact that the data would be treated with confidentiality was also explained to them and the researcher emphasized that only partial confidentiality could be ensured during the focus group sessions. Privacy was ensured by using an area in the church where it is private and nobody else had access to. All the records have been stored on a password protected laptop and hard copies of information kept under lock and key. Once the research has been published, the digital recordings and transcriptions will be kept for a period of five years at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies, NWU.

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness of the research process the model of Lincoln and Guba (1985) was followed, who described in detail the four aspects (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) necessary to sustain trustworthiness. Credibility was ensured through member checking and triangulation. The researcher made use of member checking (Schurink, Fouché, & De Vos, 2011) after the focus group meetings. This was done by making contact with some participants to make sure that the researcher understood the participants' point of view by asking if there was a match between research participants' views and the researcher's reconstruction and representation of them. Data triangulation was also used to ensure the credibility in this study. This involved the simultaneous collection and analysis of data so that the different findings could be compared giving the researcher the opportunity to produce more complete conclusions (Delpont & Fouché, 2011). According to Kennedy (2009), triangulation facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more methods of data collection. In this study focus groups, field notes and collages as data collection method were utilised. Focus groups remained the primary method of data collection where collages and field notes were utilised as additional supportive methods to gain more data. This was used to test the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments. The findings obtained through the use of the different methods correlated and were found to be consistent.

Dependability was facilitated through an audit trail which provided a description of the research steps that were taken from the start of the research project, as well as the reporting of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This audit trail includes the raw data (field notes, transcribed focus group meetings and collages) and data analysis notes. Denscombe (2010) states that confirmability addresses the issue of objectivity and focus on the extent to which qualitative research can produce findings that are free from influence of the researcher. The researcher achieved

confirmability by audio recording of the focus group meetings and transcribing the audio recordings verbatim to ensure an accurate reflection of the participants' views.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is not possible to understand any phenomenon without reference to the context in which it is embedded. Thus, the researcher was in continuous reflection about her own perceptions and how it may influence the findings and also familiarised herself with the context in which the participants live.

## Results

Three main themes with subthemes emerged from the data analysis and is presented in Table 6. Appropriate verbatim quotations are provided as validation. These findings are directly linked to the experiences of caregivers in this specific poor community regarding their children's play in the middle childhood.

*Table 6: Themes with subthemes portraying experiences of caregivers*

Themes	Subtheme
<b>Theme 1: Different types of play</b>	1.1 Physical play and sport
	1.2 Fantasy/imitation and rhythmic play
	1.3 Types of games in the community
	1.4 Types of toys in the community
<b>Theme 2: Factors influencing children's play</b>	2.1 Environmental, cultural and community influences on play
	2.2 The impact of technology on play
<b>Theme 3: Constraints in the community affecting play</b>	3.1 The effect of poverty on play
	3.2 Children's safety and lack of resources
	3.3 Supportive structures in the community

### **Theme 1: Different types of play**

Andrews (2012) and Smith (2010) state that various types of play exist. The participants in this study noticed the following types of play (physical, fantasy/imitation and rhythmic) in their children.

### ***Subtheme 1.1: Physical play and sport***

*Physical play* such as “skop die ball” (kick the ball) is also a unique type of physical play that is found in this community “...*the children there maybe they like to play “skop die ball” (kick the ball)*”. The most general sports that are played in this poor community with which children spend most of their time, are soccer and rugby as can be confirmed with the following comment: “...*and soccer as well my boy loves soccer, actually rugby but if he can play soccer it is also fine.*” Literature (Andrews, 2012; Lester & Russell, 2010) support the fact that physical play leads to the ability to do things requiring muscle strength, and muscle control dexterity. Although play is also an enjoyable activity for the children, it holds secondary benefits like motor skills which can help the child to partake in other physical activities apart from play (Andrews, 2012). Smith (2010:39) states that children can be motivated to keep physically active through exercise and rough-and tumble play. The participants also added that when they can buy a tennis ball for their children they will also use that, especially at school: “*And “handjie tennis” (handtennis) they play that also.*”

### ***Subtheme 1.2: Fantasy/imitation and rhythmic play***

Another type of play that is found in the community, is fantasy or imitation play which is more popular amongst the girls in the poor community and is confirmed through the following comment “...*and then it is always something about beauty, fantasising, especially the girls they fantasise a lot. Like one of the other participants said, they are imitating, like and especially on beauty they don't want this toys or watches they want real stuff.*”

“...*I'm caregiver of a twelve-year old girl at this stage when she's playing I can see she imitates a lot of what's happening around her like for instance selling she will always do her best, try to impress her customers when they play shopshop, she's the manager of the shop then she will try to be very polite and sell her goods nicely also advertising stuff so that the people can buy.*”

Fantasy or imitation play can assist children to take on their fears or to explore their world (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). Children in the middle childhood start enjoying play activities and games that involve structured rules (Biddle Garcia-Nevarez, Henderson, & Valero-Kerrick, 2013). Although they still enjoy elements of fantasy, the logic in games and play now becomes the focus of interest (Sobel, 2002:12). Findings from a study done by Smith & Lillard (2012) reported that children would stop to engage in pretend play around 11 years of age, this correlates with the finding in this study.

Lastly, according to most of the participants' rhythmic play is also one of the most popular types of play in this community; this can be due to the fact that most children in this community are exposed to religious activities such as worship at the church or ministries or dancing in the youth group. *"...she likes to sing and each and every time when they play she's the one that will pick out the songs, she tells them what songs to be sung...and in singing or in some other play when they are playing what is it... other games, they like this rhythmic play you know play where there are rhythm or where there are repetition of words, clapping hands and all that."*

Games with rhymes such as clapping rhymes, dancing and singing games have been popular activities in the middle childhood phase and there has been a wealth of studies globally which carefully detail the rhythmic games children play in playgrounds, homes and streets (Marsh, 2010). These rhythmic games like dancing, singing and clapping can help children improve their vocabulary and self-confidence (Bishop & Curtis, 2001:5-7).

### ***Subtheme 1.3: Types of games in the community***

The participants were excited when they began to discuss the types of games in their community. The following games mentioned are typical to their community: *"...scotch (hopscotch), they also play scotch- Kierietjie Kierietjie..."*; *"Yes soccer, 'mamma safe', marbles, toll and now and then they have a story of playing blockman patile-- we are looking for each other."* Another participant added that children in the community play a lot with cans and tins. *"There are two kinds of "blikkies" (cans/tins) one they put it on top of each other and the other one they make it flat and then they have to put it in a container with their feet."* With the one they make the cold drink cans flat and then they have to get it into a container with their feet; with the empty tin food containers they also have various games they play, for example they build towers or use it when they are playing with marbles.

*"It seems the games are more seasonal than we use to play because I see them now playing with tops and then it differs in the time of year"*. The participants also agreed that games were more seasonal and the types of games also depended on what was currently popular.2U KIDS (2015) highlighted games mostly played in the South Africa, such as One-two-beki, Haisedi, Sowatsjawatsjawa, Hopscotch, Stick in the circle etc. The only similar game identified which the participants also mentioned in the community was hopscotch.

### ***Subtheme 1.4: Types of toys in the community***

Most of the participants said that, because they do not have sufficient finances to buy toys for their children, it forces the children to be creative. In this specific community participants experienced the following when it came to the self-made types of toys that their children play with. *“Ok like that side near the bush they have slingshots, they do it the whole time you just see the birds falling there. They make their own slingshots or their older brothers will help. They then use the tube of the bicycle then they will cut it nice and take a stick then they’ll make that slingshot and then they will just shoot”*. Another participant added: *“The children also play with kites which they also make themselves, most of their stuff they will make themselves.”*

All the participants stated that children in this community were very creative in designing their own games and toys. *“They are very creative so for the kites they will go and look for wool or they use rope that rope they will tie together, then they will take bags, plastic bags.”* Although literature (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012) state that parents who cannot afford market driven materials may feel disempowered to actively play with and enrich their children using the most effective tools themselves, the participants highlighted that the children were very creative in making their own toys, and some of the participants stated that they will assist their children in making these toys, such as kites and dolls. This is supported by Bartie *et al.* (2015), Louw and Louw (2014) and Nwokah, Hsu, & Gulker. (2013) also stated that children living in communities with socio-economic challenges are more creative when it comes to the types of toys that they play with in the community.

### **Theme 2: Factors influencing children’s play**

Where the above mentioned theme focused on factors influencing caregivers’ involvement in their children’s play, the following theme focuses more on general factors that have an influence on children’s play in this community.

According to Andrews (2012) children will play anywhere, adapting to their surroundings and the time available. Each culture views play in a distinct way, and the reaction of adults to play also varies (Smith, 2010). Play can be seen as an effect of culture, as adult culture influences the play that is seen; but it is also a cause of culture, as children’s play reproduces but also changes culture over time (Lester & Russell, 2010; Tahmores, 2011). This study identified that, in this specific community, certain factors have an influenced the children’s play.

### ***Subtheme 2.1: Environmental, cultural and community influences on play***

Most of the participants agreed that children in the community were exposed to negative environmental factors such as the use of hubbly bubbly. *“I’m going to be honest they are exposed to this hubbly bubbly especially the 11/12-year olds, they play with the hubbly bubbly, smoking their lungs out. The 11-year ones, because in the community they mingle with this others the older ones and then they don’t believe to go to the playgrounds...”. Then they will be sitting in corners in groups and then they will be starting this and the small ones of 11 years they will be checking their “ou boeties” with the hubbly bubbly and dagga and whatever, they are exposed to those things”.*

Children in this community also act out through play what they are exposed to in their community. The following is an example of this given by one of the participants: *“...it is highly known that those ladies who are not working whenever they have children or whenever they are pregnant they are going to get grants then you will see and find the kids playing, you see them taking their bags putting them in their stomach as if they are pregnant and I’ll ask what they’re doing they’ll say no were going to the grants. And then you see, you hear the movement of their footsteps in the ground and they say no were going to the grants, that’s what they are exposed to. That’s what they are playing.”*

It was also evident that there is much diversity with regard to different cultures and religions within the community which also influence these children’s play: *“Children are befriending other children from unique backgrounds and also adopting that, sometimes, sometimes you don’t understand your own child because she is doing the things of those people.”*[This participant was talking about children growing up in houses with different religious and cultural backgrounds than that of their own- therefore the reference to those people]. According to Lester and Russell (2010:44) all communities with their diverse cultures has a great influence on children’s play. In South-Africa children’s diverse backgrounds and different experiences provide them with the opportunities to learn and express themselves through play in relation to their own unique background (Louw & Louw, 2014). The culture and community within which the child grows up will have a direct influence on children’s play and children’s play materials or toys (Louw & Louw, 2014).

### ***Subtheme 2.2: The impact of technology on play***

The last subtheme regarding factors that influence children’s play is one that all the participants mentioned and although most participants do not have things such as television and play stations, most of them had cell phones. Participants were

of opinion that children will always take their phones and play games on it, or visit friends that have televisions so that they can watch television. It was also noted that most of the participants felt that technology is not that big of an issue early in middle childhood but starting from age 11-12 children will hassle caregivers to get cell phones or to watch television. The following comments made by participants with regard to the impact that technology have on children's play clearly illustrates this: *"...they'll always take their parents cell phones and play games on it."* *"...and technology is taking a lot of physical play from this children, they don't experience that anymore like we experienced it, but now they are sitting in front of the television and it is only this PlayStation see technology has taken a lot, cell phones the language that they are using it is giving them problems in writing correctly at school"*

Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) confirmed the above findings by stating that children spend less time engaging in play and physical activity and spend more time engaged in sedentary activities, such as viewing television for hours, playing video games, or listening to music. In somewhat of a contrast to the above mentioned findings, Marsh (2010) stated that children and parents are active users of technology and highlighted the benefits regarding the use of technology in children's play where it increases children's creativity. However, the participants in this research perceived technology only as taking up children's time and keeping children from engaging in more active and physical play. The participants also stated that technology negatively influence their children's academic development (such as spelling and writing).

### **Theme 3: Constraints in the community affecting play**

Constraints on play present in communities that was also highlighted by Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) as well as Lester and Russell (2010) are poverty, environmental hazards (presence of inadequate sanitation), safety (when children play outside in the streets where there is increased violence in the community), fewer resources and illnesses due to poverty (HIV and Tuberculosis).

#### ***Subtheme 3.1: The effect of poverty on play***

Although all the participants agreed that poverty affect their children's play and their involvement with their children in play. They also saw the positive side and shared with great excitement how creative their children in the community can be. All the participants agreed with the following statement: *"...it seems like...the poorer the environment the more children create games for themselves"*. It was noted in previous research that children from low socio-economic communities were creative in the games they played or used what were available in their direct

community (Marsh, 2010; Nwokah *et al.*, 2013). A number of authors, such as Brown (2012); Louw and Louw (2014) and Milteer and Ginsburg, (2012) suggest that children living in poverty or extreme neglect of institutionalized settings, use and adapt natural and man-made items in their living environment without the need for commercial toys.

### ***Subtheme 3.2: Children's safety and lack of resources***

Children's safety in the community in which this research was done, is one of the aspects caregivers worried about the most. Caregivers stated that approximately 8-10 years ago parents did not worry that much about their children's safety and children could freely play outside in the streets even at night, but with the increase of violence, trafficking, drug use, etc. in the community parents would rather keep their children close to home. The following comments of participants with regard to safety in the community is illustrative of this: *"You don't see a lot of children that play in the streets, now they must ask because it is high crime now and so it is always that we want to know where the children are going, then we will say you're not going there, you're not going down there, you're not going down the street rather play in the yard."* *"Today is not safe. If your child goes out you want to know where is your child going what is she learning there or sometimes the sad factor that I think that the parents must now break away from I'm mostly speaking to myself, fear of the unknown you know our children experience others things than us."* [With the above mentioned comments the caregivers expressed the constant worry they experience when their children play in the street or not close to home. The caregivers also mentioned that because they are working longer hours they can't be with their children a lot which will make them worry what their children are up to after school when there are no supervision.]

In a study conducted by Kimbro and Schachter (2011) it was found that mothers who lived in poverty stricken areas feared for their children's safety during outdoor play which may have restricted the child's free playtime. Another study conducted by Bartie *et al.* (2015) in a low socio-economic community in South Africa, found that some parents felt the environment was safe for their children, but most parents were concerned about their children's safety and stated that they would rather let their children play indoors to prevent them from getting stolen. This correlates with the findings in this study with caregivers stating that they feel safer if their children are kept indoors rather than playing outside.

In this study all the participants agreed that there is a lack of *resources* in their community and the resources that exist in the community (like playparks) hold various safety hazards. Participants made the following statements with regard to resources in this community and how it influences their children's play:

*“...they don’t believe to go to the playgrounds because there is nothing anyway in our playgrounds”. “And yes they play and they don’t believe in play grounds. I think we short resources in the community.”“... you can go to that park and there’s no slides...”* The participants do not feel comfortable to send their children to the playgrounds, because it is not safe and they do not trust the apparatus because it is old, not well maintained and rusty: *“And the play apparatus is not set up completely, it is not safe”*.

According to Fearn and Howard (2012) children’s play can be influenced by the dynamic interaction between challenges they face like poverty and the availability of resources. Luckily children are creative in nature and will use things in their direct environment if there is a lack of resources in their community (Lester & Russell, 2010). This was also found in this community where the children utilised material in their environment to create games and toys.

### ***Subtheme 3.3: Supportive structures in the community***

Among the participants were mixed feelings with regard to supportive community structures. Some participants felt that there are no or few supportive structures in the community [such as safe play areas or groups for children, clubs where children can join to practise sports or dancing etc.] which is confirmed with comments such as *“There is nothing that can keep them busy they must bring a ball that’s the only thing they can play with in our playgrounds”*. *“You know I’ve realised during our growing up time there was a lot of structures in the community that you know children could go to and they’ll sort of relieve the parents a little bit from playing, we went to the scouts we’ll go to you know, because I realise it seems those community structures are few now.”*[This particular participant was of opinion that when they were children there were supportive structures such as the boy scouts where they went to learn things. This also kept them busy and they had the opportunity to make friends. But he feels that these days there aren’t many supportive structures where children can partake in].

Some participants stated that although there are some supportive structures in the community it is not enough to fulfil children’s needs, especially when it comes to children’s play and recreation. *“But there are still some good, her husband (referring to one of the participant’s husbands) for example coach a soccer team in the community, ... he is extremely passionate about these children and I feel these children it is for them, I believe at least they have a goal and it helps them from the negative things so at least there is that.”*. Another participant added *“...and then maybe the youth group they go all together to the youth they, we have this spiritual dancing at church where we make sure they are involved*

*with...* Bartie *et al.* (2015) found that in a low socio-economic community, many community members shared the responsibility of looking after the children including, parents, grandparents, older siblings and neighbours. In this particular community different churches and ministries also serve as a supportive structure for parents and children.

## **Conclusion**

Each and every child has the right to rest, leisure and engage in recreational and play activities (United Nations, 2013). Play holds numerous benefits for a child's holistic development and gives the opportunity for children to express themselves (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). The reality is that most children in South Africa face challenges such as poverty which can affect the above mentioned rights (Louw & Louw, 2014) as well as influence the way they play, as play of children are influenced by their communities and culture (Ellis,2011).

Different types of play were identified by the participants which included physical, fantasy/imitation and rhythmic play. It is evident that the children in this community enjoy participating in sports such as soccer, rugby and some of the girls play netball. Fantasy or imitation play was found to be more popular amongst the girls. Rhythmic play was found as one of the most popular types of play in this community; this can be due to the fact that most children in this community are exposed to religious activities such as worship at the church or ministries or dancing in the youth group.

Certain types of games were found to be typical to this community and include scotch (hopscotch), Kierietjie Kierietjie, "mamma safe", marbles, toll, "blockman patile we are looking for each other" as well as games with cans and tins.

A shortage of sufficient finances on the part of caretakers/parents to buy toys for the children, forces the children to be creative and they make their own toys, like slingshots and kites. It is established that despite living in poverty, children in this community are very creative in designing toys and games to keep them busy.

It is evident that certain factors have an influence on the children's play in this community as the children in the community are exposed to negative environmental factors such as the use of hubbly bubbly. The negative influences of the community are acted out in their play. The diversity with regard to the different cultures and religions within the community also influence the children's play' for example participants noticed that their children use the type of language in their play which are unique to a certain culture in the community. Another example was provided by participants of the custom in their culture

about the unacceptability for a man to kiss a woman in front of other people, but what they experience through their children's play, was that the children would playfully kiss their play wife and when questioned about their actions, it will come to the fore that the children saw their friends mother and father embracing.

Technology has an influence on children's play in the community as confirmed by participants who stated that it will cause children to sit in front of the television or they will hassle participants to use their cell phones or to buy them cell phones. The participants stated that they prefer their children to keep active and play outside, but even if they play outside the participants are constantly worried about their safety and what they are exposed to. Therefore, the participants saw the use of technology as having a negative effect on children as it also affects their spelling and they cannot always censor what the children watch when it comes to television shows.

Certain constraints in the community which affect the play of children were identified. Although all the participants agreed that poverty affect their children's play, they also saw the positive side and shared, with great excitement, how creative their children in the community can be with regard to making up their own games. The participants also stated that they can be more involved in their children's lives when it comes to spending more time playing with them or helping them with their homework.

One of the main concerns was the children's safety in the community as the children are exposed to negative aspects such as violence, drug abuse and poor resources when they play outside in the community. Children are therefore rather kept indoors rather than playing outside.

In this study all the participants agreed that there is a lack of resources in their community and the resources that exist in the community (like playparks) hold various safety hazards. They stated that it is not safe and there are not many supportive structures to which they can send their children to keep them busy after school.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that professionals rendering services to children in this specific age group be aware of the typical games children prefer to play such as imitation, rhythmic, fantasy and various physical play for example sports and playing with a ball. It will also be helpful to take into consideration the impediments highlighted in the findings that these children face on a daily basis. Noteworthy data were obtained with regard to the impact of technology on children's play in

the poor community, especially in the adolescent stage. Although this aspect was not investigated further it can be recommended for further investigation by other researchers. There is a need in the community for more supportive structures or programs that will keep their children busy after school when most of the caregivers are still at work. It will also benefit caregiver's in the community to receive guidance on how to engage with their children in play that will be valuable to their children's growth and development. A more thorough exploration of the different types of games that are played in the community can be recommended where the creativeness of these children in developing their own games with the limited resources they have can be explored.

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## SECTION C

### SUMMARY, EVALUATION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous sections of the research described the orientation, findings and discussions of the research project. In this section the findings are evaluated and recommendations are made based on findings regarding the experiences of caregivers of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province, South Africa.

#### 1. Research summary

What is known is that all children play, no matter their country, background or community (Russ & Niec, 2011:3). Play is a universal phenomenon which holds various benefits for a child's holistic development (Smith, 2010:1-2; Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009:23) and is important as it assists children to develop emotionally, cognitively, physically and socially (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008:91-95; Ginsburg, 2007:183). Although every child has the right to engage in play and recreational activities (United Nations, 2013:3) not all children are given the opportunity to enjoy this right. Poverty, drug abuse and violence are factors which are present in various communities in South Africa. Therefore, children from this country living in communities faced with challenges like poverty and a lack of resources will, express themselves in a unique way which may differ from other countries (Bartie *et al.*, 2015:1; Louw & Louw, 2014:259; Papalia *et al.*, 2009:269; VanFleet *et al.*, 2010:9).

A child's cultural and environmental background need to be taken into account when focussing on children's play from a specific community. This study aimed to gain information with regard to middle childhood children's play in a poor community. The study therefore aimed to, not only develop knowledge, but also to provide a basis for future studies.

This study was done through a qualitative interpretive approach with an explorative descriptive research design in order to explore caregivers' experiences of play. A literature study was undertaken to explore the definition of play, elements of play, types of play, importance and benefits of play, play in middle childhood, play in

different cultures and backgrounds, potential influences on children's play and how poverty can affect play. Eighteen participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling and data was collected through three focus group meetings (six participants per group session). Collages were utilised as an additional data collection method and to start the conversation in the focus groups. A question guide guided the researcher through the sessions, but was only utilised when conversation stagnated. Communication techniques (probing, clarification, minimal verbal response, reflection and paraphrasing) were utilised to encourage participants to engage in conversation or elaborate on statements. All sessions were audio recorded and recordings were transcribed. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse and code the data and findings were compared with content from the literature study. From the coded data three main themes arose and the findings were presented in article format. Recommendations and suggestions for further studies were made to broaden literature with regard to play, specifically in poor communities.

## **2. Evaluation of the research**

### **2.1 Aim of the study**

The aim of this qualitative study was to, through an explorative descriptive design, explore the experiences of caregivers with regard to play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province, South Africa. The mentioned research methodologies were used to achieve the following objectives i) to explore and describe play of middle childhood children in a poor community in the North West Province through the eyes of the caregiver ii) to make a positive contribution to broadening literature in the field of play through learning more on how caregivers experience their children's play in a poor community. The findings could contribute in a positive way and may assist professionals rendering services, such as play therapy, to children in this specific community.

### **2.2 Significant findings**

The participants mentioned different types of play that were mostly found in the community which are physical play, sports, fantasy and rhythmic play. The caregivers

also explained with great excitement the unique games that can be found in their community, for example Mamma safe: this is a game in which children use old pantyhoses that are tied together to form a rope to use in the game. This game will usually consist of three children where two children will stand with the pantyhose tied around their legs and the third must jump over the pantyhose. The pantyhose will move up and the children will see who can jump the highest. What was also apparent from the comments from most of the caregivers was that children in this community were extremely creative when it came to making their own toys. This was mostly because parents and caregivers could not afford to buy toys for their children which forced the children to use the resources in their community or whatever were available. However, some participants expressed that, with regard to age related play, most of their children start to participate in more technologically driven games from the age of approximately 11 years and older. Therefore at the end of middle childhood (eleven years) it seems that children will begin to partake in play which involve some sort of technology. Participants also explained that technology was becoming a major problem, because children would rather watch television than play outside.

They also mentioned that the environment, culture and community influence how children play. The community has a diverse constellation with regard to religious values and cultural backgrounds which parents stated can be noticed through their children's play. Poverty definitely has an influence on how their children play, especially with regard to the toys that they have. Children in this community have to think creatively to keep themselves busy. It is also evident that resources in the community were another factor that influence children's play. There are insufficient resources such as play areas or parks where children can safely play. Most participants raised their fears regarding the resources in their community. They highlighted that even the existing resources, such as play areas, are unsafe; older children use these areas to abuse alcohol and drugs, the play apparatus are not safely set up and most of the play materials are rusted. One of the weaknesses that was identified in the community was the lack of supportive structures where children could safely engage in certain activities which can involve play.

### **2.3 Dissemination of information**

- An article has been prepared for submission to the journal *Social Work/ Maatskaplike Werk* for possible publication.
- The researcher will give feedback by presenting findings to the participants to explain research findings.

### **3. Recommendations from the study**

Most caregivers did experience play as a valuable activity, some caregivers mentioned that they wished they knew more with regard to the value of play and how to contribute to their children's development through play. It is necessary that caregivers should be made aware of all the benefits play hold for children so that they can engage with their children in play and also encourage play at home.

Further research may include a thorough exploration of the unique games the children in poor communities play. The children in this community already show that they creatively keep themselves busy with the resources that are available in their direct environment. Resources in the community need to receive attention so that the community can be a safe place where the children can freely play, without caregivers living in fear of what their children are exposed to. In this context one of the obviously worried participants at the end of a focus group session made the following remark which included a very sensible recommendation: "Most of the problems arise in the school holidays were children are left unsupervised. You know it is in this time were the children begin to experiment with things like dagga and other drugs because they are left alone the whole day. Don't' you all think it is a good idea if we as parents and caregivers that are not working this holiday ask pastor if we can keep the children busy at the church and we can work out a schedule so that there will be supervision. We can maybe show the kids some of the games we played when we were younger"

### **4. Limitations of the study**

The following are limitations of this study:

- Only four out of the eighteen participants included in the study were males; this was because most of the males in the community had to work long hours and could not participate in the study.
- The experiences of caregivers with regard to middle childhood children were explored, therefore, findings are limited to play of children in the middle childhood.

## **5. Contribution of the study**

The findings of this study contribute on a macro level to broadening literature in the field of play and how caregivers in a poor community experience their children's play. Other researchers can use findings from this study to further elaborate on what play comprises in other poor communities and compare findings. The literature can be used as guidance by professionals working with children from this community to take into consideration how these children play and which constraints children face when it comes to play in the community. Professions such as Social work, Psychology, Occupational therapy will integrate play in their work with children. Therefore it will be useful for professionals to take note of the findings and to utilise this in their intervention with children from this specific community. This will empower professionals with regard to rendering services to children from low socio-economic backgrounds so that they can be aware that play may be different for these children.

The participants, as a result of becoming aware that they are active agents when it comes to their children's safety, decided to begin a project during school holidays. This project will aim at involving caregivers in the community to actively keep children busy in a safe environment.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study aimed to qualitatively explore and describe the experience of caregivers with regard to play of middle childhood children in a poor community. By doing this professionals rendering services to children residing in a poor community can utilise these findings to take into consideration the unique way children in a poor community play. This can also broaden literature on children's play in a South African context.

Caregivers in this specific community were used in this study to get their view on the play of children in their middle childhood. It was found that their experience with regard to how and with what their children play, are similar and that the children were resilient in the midst of all the challenges they face in the community, mostly due to poverty. This causes children to think and play more creatively. Their creativity was especially obvious with regard to the types of games they played as well as the toys they created from material found in their direct environment. Technology is influencing children's play, but caregivers highlighted that it affects children more as they start to move into the adolescent stage. A concern in the community that arose in light of this discussion is that caregivers excessively worry about their children's safety in the community when they play outside in the streets or in the parks. This is in direct contrast to a child's right as aligned by the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. Every child must be given the opportunity to engage in play in an environment that is safe so that the enjoyment of these rights won't be hindered. The exploration of the experiences of caregivers in this community described similar findings regarding how caregivers see children's play in this community. Although these children face certain constraints when it came to how and with what they play, according to the caregivers they showed strengths and their enthusiasm when it came to play were remarkable.

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# APPENDIX 1

## Informed consent form



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>  
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Faculty of Health Sciences

### **EXPLORING PLAY OF MIDDLE CHILDHOOD CHILDREN IN A POOR COMMUNITY IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE: CAREGIVERS' EXPERIENCES**

#### **CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I am Tania Prinsloo from the North-West University working on exploring caregivers' experiences of play of middle childhood children in a poor community and I would like to invite you to give consent and participate in this study. To follow is information about the study so that you can make an informed decision.

#### **The requirements of participating and reason for choosing you**

- You must be a caregiver (such as a child's aunt, uncle or grandparent/s who take the responsibility to look after the child because the mother and/or father are not able to support the child anymore) of a child or children in their middle childhood (age 6 to 11).
- You must be a caregiver of a child in the middle childhood which resides in this poor community.
- You must be living with the child or children.
- You must be able to attend the sessions with the researcher that would take place as arranged with you beforehand and willing to be audio taped.
- You can speak Afrikaans, English or Setswana. A translator will be available for those of you who speak Setswana.
- You will have to voluntarily participate in the study.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore caregivers' experiences of play of middle childhood children living in a poor community in the North West Province in South-

Africa. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a parent or caregiver of a child/children in their middle childhood and your experiences are very valuable to me.

## **2. PROCEDURE**

If you agree to be in this study you will be expected to do all of the following:

- You need to complete and sign the informed consent form that you got during the orientation session and place it back in the sealed box at the church.
- It will be expected of you to attend a focus group meeting of approximately an hour and a half.
- The researcher will discuss a convenient date, time and venue with the participants.
- You will be asked to share your experiences during the focus group meeting.
- The focus group meeting will be held at Jesus Loves You Ministries.
- Audio recordings will be made of the focus group meeting if you agree to it.

## **3. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

The researcher can predict no dangers or permanent consequences if you take part in the study. If you feel uncomfortable during the study and need to talk to someone a registered counsellor, that is not involved in the study, will be available. This session will be free and at no cost for you but is only for research related issues.

The focus group means that you will be sitting in a group and share your experiences with me and the other people in the group. That means that they will know what you say and why you say it. However, I will ask people in the group to sign a form to say that they will not share the information that others share in the group with people outside the group. Furthermore, your names will not be mentioned in the dissertation or the article that might get published. The information that you share will be written down in a document and will be kept on the computer of the researcher.

#### **4. BENEFITS**

Benefits to you - You might understand your own experience or other participants' experiences which you can use later with your child/children.

Benefits to the larger community- The study can assist professionals working with children to get insight in play of middle childhood children living in a poor community in North West Province.

#### **5. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study.

#### **6. PAYMENT**

You will receive no payment for participation. Snacks and beverages will be available at the focus group meeting. An amount of R20 will be given to you to cover your travelling cost.

#### **7. QUESTIONS**

You are welcome to ask any questions to the researcher before you decide to give consent. You are also welcome to contact Dr. Lizane Wilson the supervisor if you have any further questions concerning your consent.

#### **8. FEEDBACK OF FINDINGS**

The findings of the research will be shared with you if you are interested. You are welcome to contact us regarding the findings of the research. We will be sharing the findings with you as soon as it is available at a group meeting. I will let you know when this date will be.

## CONSENT FORM

### PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY

**You are free to not be in this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have signed the form to give consent without any consequences.**

Should you be willing to participate you must please sign below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above mentioned study. I am not forced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be given to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation as well as what might be the possible risks and should I need further discussions someone will be available.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the person obtaining consent

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Question guide**

#### **Non leading questions for focus group meetings**

These questions will serve as a guideline, in the focus group meetings, to address questions at the caregivers that have children currently in their middle childhood.

Typical questions that can be asked in focus group meetings:

1. Introductory opening
2. What do you understand by play of children?
3. What type of play is your child involved in?
4. Tell me about their play in the community
5. What do you think is the value of play?

## APPENDIX 3

### **Guidelines for Journal: Social Work/ Maatskaplike werk**

The Journal publishes articles, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of social work.

1. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans.
2. All articles should include an abstract in English of not more than 100 words.
3. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee.
4. All refereeing is strictly confidential (double blind peer-review).
5. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice.
6. Articles of fewer than 2,000 words or more than 10,000 words are normally not considered for publication.
7. Manuscripts should be typed in 12 pt Times Roman double-spaced on A4 paper size.
8. Use the Harvard system for references.
9. Short references in the text: When word-for-word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger, 1967:12).
10. More details about sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References".
11. The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors.

## APPENDIX 4

### Colour coded focus group (two pages)

Themes	Subtheme
<b>Theme 1: Different types of play</b>	<p><b>1.1 Physical play and sport</b></p> <p>1.2 Fantasy/imitation and rhythmic play</p> <p>1.3 Types of games in the community</p> <p>1.4 Types of toys in the community</p>
<b>Theme 2: Factors influencing children's play</b>	<p><b>2.1 Environmental, cultural and community influences on play</b></p> <p>2.2 The impact of technology on play</p>
<b>Theme 3: Constraints in the community affecting play</b>	<p><b>3.1 The effect of poverty on play</b></p> <p><b>3.2 Children's safety and lack of resources</b></p> <p><b>3.3 Supportive structures in the community</b></p>

**Table 7: Key to focus group colour coding**

P5: Cell phones

Researcher: Ok what will they be doing on the cell phone?

P5: Games, they'll check who sent pictures, and they'll waste airtime

Researcher: And then what type of games are on the phone?

P5: It will maybe be like blocks what is that building blocks or maybe shooting like war battle games I don't know how to name it but it is those games.

Researcher: Just an indication how many of your children own a cell phone?

(Only two participants raised their hands)

P6: I recently bought my child one, not one of my previous children had cell phones but my child is almost twelve so I bought her a cell phone the other day with her birthday. And what I recently noticed what she plays a lot on her cell phone is this

dolls and then a person can decide the colour of the eyes and the clothes she wants to dress the doll with.

P4: But most of the children will play on their **parent's cell phones**

Researcher: Ok

P1: Mine would like to be indoors

Researcher: Indoors? Ok

P1: **Looking at the TV**, explaining what is happening there. Mommy have you seen this have you seen that, yes indoors.

Research: Not outside?

P1: Indoors, mommy have you seen that he's doing this. He likes to explain what is happening, I thought maybe my child will become a lawyer or whatever because he is the talkative one. So he use the **picture especially the TV**. He likes to explain what is happening.

Researcher: Everything inside

P1: Everything he want to know what happened when does that thing happen, when and where.

P3: Yes, mine like to, I think he's a mechanic because we have to put there is a small box of tools, we have to put it far because every day and every time when he sees the laptop he wants to know what is this laptop, why is this laptop people using it, he wants to see inside the laptop so he is very creative. I don't know at school but I use to hear he is the joker there at the school.

Researcher: O so he makes a lot of jokes?

P3: Yes

P2: Ok my children likes to play **dollhouse**. Outside, inside and they like to **decorate they will take her towels then that is now their table cloth** and they will **take tins and then put in flowers**, they decorate and the **dolls are being picked upped on their backs like the mamma and the baby** and the what. Yes, they like that.

Researcher: Ok so they use the things inside the house

P2: Yes

P2: Me and my children, especially the girls usually play “gaaitjieklip”.

Researcher: Excuse me?

P2: “Gaaitjiekilp”

Researcher: What is “gaaitjiekilp”?

P2: We also call it KettieKettie that is where you take the small stones and they see how fast they can get it in a hole.

Researcher: How does that work? I have never heard of that.

P2: Yes, the children in our community usually play it.

P4: That is where they use these stones to count.

Researcher: So it can learn them to count?

P4: Yes, so they have to take it one by one, as you throw one stone in the air you have to take one to the hole.

Researcher: So what do you call it?

P4: “Gaaitjiekilp” or “kettiekettie”

P2: Yes, my son is still playing that and marbles and playing with tolls.

Researcher: Ok so I want to know how do they play in this community? So you said soccer?

P5: Yes, soccer, marbles, toll and now and then there is also the story of blockmanpatile, “Onssoekmekaar”

Researcher: What is that?

P 5: BlockmanPatile

Researcher: Blockman?

P5: It is almost like hide and seek

P1: Yes, our children, I'm going to be honest they are exposed to this hubbly bubbly especially the 11/12 year olds, they play with the hubbly bubbly, smoking their lungs out. The 12 years ones, because in the community they mingle with this others the older ones and then they don't believe to go to the playgrounds because there is nothing anyway in our playgrounds. There is nothing that can keep them busy they must bring a ball that's the only thing they can play in our playgrounds. Then they will be sitting in corners in groups and then they will be starting this and the small ones of 12 years they will be checking their "ouboeties" with the hubbly bubbly and dagga and whatever, they are exposed to those things

P2: Yes, I saw this one 12 years he smokes dagga

P1: Yes, you see and the glue, and you will also see they go around asking for money, the only thing they can actually play with in the community is ball. Especially the boys and our girls is something else because they don't have, the girls they group themselves and then they will be going to the other ones place and they'll be making themselves beautiful and andand... You see the 12 years ones

Researcher: Ok the older ones?

P1: Yes, so really at the age of twelve they don't play anymore, they don't play.

Researcher: What did you want to add?

P5: I am one of the lucky people my child is 12 now and he still plays and the other thing that he loves is "riem", tou

Researcher: Riem?

P5: Yes, jumping rope

P4: But in the community?

P5: Ooo, in the community

P2: Yes, in the community

Researcher: Yes, and with whom how do they play, neighbours children? Children in the same school? Or mostly alone?

P5: Yes, see why I mentioned of “riemspring” sometimes you will get it is the neighbours children, children of different backgrounds which comes together to play it is usually not just my children alone, usually they will play together. Or even children in one street, where they play together.

APPENDIX 5

Collages (three participants)

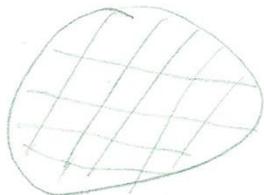
Imagination



DIERE dinge



Diere BPHuis



Sokker



\*They are exposed to internet,  
 \*They demand from Parent to have a cell phone as a tool!

Girls

fantasize alot, on beauty + being Parents



They watch TV more than playing.



Futurama FOX 06:45

BBC Ent. om 21:00) het onlangs aangekondig seisoen

1. They are very choosy selective on channels they watch.

2. Watching alot



Aksie - 8



Generations - 23



Glam Guru - 38



eNuus - 39



Vind 'n fliel - 42



Hollywood - 78



Boys admires cars and don't believe to play with them.

\*Boys plays ball



Children age 12.  
 Is very interesting  
 This time around you can  
 exactly see what  
 you should find  
 Interesting. eg.  
 This picture.  
 She plays customer  
 service and  
 do her best to  
 be nice to her customer. And to make  
 Sure she sell all her stuff.



Talking good care  
 of

Dreaming and Imitate  
 marriage and having a  
 Good and happy family  
 Beautiful dress and  
 fascinating about appear-  
 ans.



P 8