The resilience of emerging adults in a stressed industrialised environment in Eswatini

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Abstract

Transitioning to adulthood can be stressful, particularly when young people live in challenging contexts. One such context is Eswatini, a low-income African country challenged by structural violence. Still, how Swazi emerging adults mitigate related challenges is unknown. To redress this knowledge gap, we report a qualitative study with 30 Swazi emerging adults (15 men; 15 women; 18-to-24-years) living in Matsapha, an industrial hub characterised by relentless physical, social, and financial stressors. Using reflexive thematic analysis, we found that a mix of resources (personal drive, enabling connections, a resourced ecology) co-supported resilience to stressors that emerging adults perceived as unavoidable. The detail of this resource-mix implies that emerging adult resilience is a developmentally and contextually responsive process. The findings also signpost that emerging adult resilience is a collaborative effort, one that requires an enabling physical and relational environment, and government commitment to co-facilitating that environment.

Keywords: emerging adulthood; resilience; phenomenological study; stressed industrialised environment; Social Ecological Theory of Resilience

The aim of this article is to explore 30 emerging adults' accounts of resilience to the challenges of Matsapha, a stressed industrialized environment in Eswatini. Resilience is the capacity to positively adapt to significant stress (Masten et al., 2021). Investigating these young people's experiences of what supports positive adjustment to Matsapha-related stress is imperative given that the combined challenges of emerging adulthood (18-29 years; Arnett, 2000) and inhabiting a stressed environment can be debilitating. Such debilitating experiences are typically to the detriment of emerging adults' achievement of developmental milestones (Schels, 2020). Understanding protective mechanisms that could buffer the challenges of a stressed environment during the period of emerging adulthood is key to young people's positive adjustment (Ungar, 2019).

Few studies have considered what enables the resilience of emerging adults in stressed environments in sub-Saharan Africa (Theron et al., 2021). Stressed communities, like Matsapha, are not unique to sub-Saharan Africa. Globally, young people are challenged by unemployment, structural disadvantage, and other risks to their wellbeing (OECD, 2020). Still, these challenges are pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa (Oppong Assante et al., 2021), and so it is important to better understand what might enable African young people's resilience to these challenges. Africa has the fastest-growing population of young people (15-24) in the world (Mitchell, 2021). The wellbeing of this fast-growing population of young people – many of whom have migrated to industrialised communities – and their potential to contribute productively to the future of the African continent, demands increased attention to their risk and resilience (Theron, 2020).

From a social ecological perspective (i.e., the Social Ecological Theory of Resilience [SETR]; Ungar, 2011), the protective mechanisms that enable resilience are understood as more than a personal capacity (Ungar, 2012, 2019). Instead, a young person's capacity to adjust well to hardship draws on personal (e.g., biological, psychological) resources *and*

social and environmental ones (e.g., supportive relationships, safe communities, green spaces) (Ungar & Theron, 2020). In other words, a social ecological framework foregrounds the importance to resilience of partnerships between individuals and their social and physical environments (Theron et al., 2021; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). In many ways this mirrors systemic understandings of resilience that caution against understanding positive adjustment as being solely/mostly underpinned by resources within the individual (Masten, 2014; Masten et al., 2021).

Further, a social ecological viewpoint emphasizes that people-environment transactions are responsive to a given developmental phase, time period, or context (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2019). That emphasis draws attention to the complexity of resilience, including the intricate intersectionality of socio-political, social, environmental, and human systems and how this enables/constrains resilience (Masten et al., 2021). Relatedly, it would be risky to assume that resources that are commonly associated with the resilience of emerging adults living in non-African contexts (e.g., American or European emerging adults; see Burt & Paysnick, 2012, for a review) would matter for the resilience of emerging adults in Eswatini.

Stressed industrialised environments and the risks to emerging adults

Globally, rural to urban migration is on the increase as people search for employment opportunities (Ipseeta et al., 2015). The same is true in Africa. Youth unemployment in Africa is high and so industrialised environments across sub-Saharan Africa attract large numbers of young people (Phiri & Jones, 2022).

Industrialised communities are usually ecologically and socially stressed contexts that typically challenge the health and wellbeing of residents (Cox et al., 2017). For instance, pollution typically affects the physical and mental health of industrial residents (Ahmad et al., 2020). Similarly, industrialised contexts are often over-crowded, under-resourced, and home

to many people who are financially challenged and/or unemployed (Purmiyati, 2020). These challenges are also associated with the high crime rates that are generally prevalent in stressed industrialised areas and, sometimes, high-risk behaviours such as sex work (Ejo-Orusa, 2020).

All over the world, the risks posed by stressed industrialised environments have the potential to jeopardize emerging adults' seamless achievement of developmental milestones (Schels, 2020). Emerging adulthood is characterised by a search for long-term partners, completing further education or training, establishing a career, achieving functional independence, and being hopefully oriented to the rest of adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Achievement of these developmental milestones can be compromised when further education or employment opportunities are limited, as is often the case in stressed industrialised communities (Baggio, et al., 2017; Hochberg & Konner, 2020). The migrant or non-cohesive nature of industrialised communities can also jeopardise finding a long-term partner or being hopeful (Ogele, 2020). The disappointment that comes when emerging adults cannot fulfil the requisite developmental tasks can further undermine their health and wellbeing (Germani et al., 2020). For instance, Rath (2022) reported high suicide rates among young people working in Chinese industries; these were linked to unfulfilled expectations of finding employment and belonging in their industrialised community. Similarly, the individualistic and capitalistic society in industrialised Korea has been associated with high depression and suicide rates among Korean emerging adults (Suh et al., 2017; Zhong et al., 2018).

In sub-Saharan Africa, emerging adults in industrialised communities are similarly vulnerable (Oppong Asante et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2021; Van Breda, 2018). Understanding what might support their resilience in stressed industrialised contexts is important, not least because the extant literature under-represents youth in majority world contexts, like Africa (Blum & Boyden, 2018). African young people's insights into what

enables resilience, including those of emerging adults in Eswatini (one of the smallest and poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa; The World Bank, 2022), could guide service providers and mental health practitioners to better support young people in contextually responsive ways to develop successfully.

The resilience of emerging adults in Eswatini

Like other young people on the African continent, Swazi young people are typically not spared the challenges of living in stressed industrialised environments. Eswatini is home to multiple stressed industrialised environments (Khumalo & Mamba, 2021). Even so, there is limited research on how Swazi emerging adults adapt to the challenges of these environments. Filling this knowledge gap is imperative because youth (15-34 years) comprise the majority of Eswatini's population (i.e., 79%) (Ministry of Sports, Culture and Youth affairs, 2015). Further, most Swazi studies of human resilience focus on children or adolescents (e.g., Gunnestad & Thwala, 2011; Mkhatshwa, 2017; Motsa & Morojele, 2019; Motsa & Morojele, 2017; Ntinda & Nkwanyana, 2017; Thwala et al., 2015). For instance, Ntinda and Nkwanyana (2017) reported the resilience of children with special needs. Similarly, Thwala and colleagues (2015) focused on children raised in single parent homes.

While these studies provide valuable information on the resilience of children in Eswatini, they cannot be reliably used as a reference point for the resilience of emerging adults. Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that is distinct from childhood and adolescence (Arnett, 2014). People typically steer towards resilience-enabling resources that are meaningful to them (i.e., that are developmentally appropriate; Yoon et al., 2021).

In addition to developmental appropriateness, meaningful resilience enablers are contextually responsive (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Following SETR, young people are likely to be better supported when resources fit their situational and cultural context (Ungar, 2019).

In other words, a given context is likely to influence which resources are more, or less, meaningful to young people's resilience (Theron et al., 2021). Hence, the pre-existing studies of Swazi resilience cannot be assumed to adequately explain the resilience of Swazi emerging adults because they generally did not consider if/how resilience enablers were contextually responsive. Similarly, although some studies of African youth resilience included emerging adults, these young people were challenged by other situational dynamics (e.g., armed conflict or famine) and were mostly not attentive to how context intersected with resilience-enabling resources (see review by Theron, 2020). A possible exception is a South African study with a small group of African emerging adults in a stressed, industrial township (Theron et al., 2021). The findings foregrounded personal agency, but also reported informal relational supports as important to emerging adult resilience. While the developmental and contextual factors fit the study that we report in this article, the aforementioned findings would need to be cautiously interrogated for goodness of fit for Swazi emerging adults.

Methodology

To date, no study has explored the resilience of Swazi emerging adults within industrial contexts. Thus, this study is essentially exploratory and has the potential to add initial insights to the pre-existing work on the resilience of emerging adults (e.g., Burt & Paysnick, 2012), also in a stressed African context (e.g., Theron et al., 2021). As is typical of exploratory work (Swedberg, 2018), the findings that result are tentative and meant to stimulate larger, follow-up studies.

In keeping with the interpretivist underpinnings of exploratory qualitative work (Ponelis, 2015), and to gain a deep understanding of emerging adults' experiences of the risks of living in a stressed, industrialised environment in Eswatini and resilience to those risks, we employed a Reflexive Thematic Analysis design (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA is

characterised by "design flexibility" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 3), and is closely aligned with phenomenology. It encourages qualitative methods that support participants to provide rich accounts of their lived experiences (Byrne, 2021). Because RTA "is concerned with exploring the truth or truths of participants' contextually situated experiences, perspectives, and behaviors" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8), it was ideally suited to the purpose of our study.

An active, reflexive researcher is central to RTA (Braun and Clarke 2019; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Put differently, unlike traditional phenomenology that requires bracketing (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020), RTA embraces researchers' subjectivity and situatedness (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As reflexive researchers, we were aware that our positioning could shape how we 'did' RTA. We acknowledge that our deep familiarity with SETR (Ungar, 2011) shaped the research questions we crafted and how we made meaning of the data. Also, as a Swazi citizen who lived in Matsapha for seven years when she was an undergraduate and master's student, the first author (NG) was sensitive to how her personal experience sensitised her to contextual dynamics that might otherwise have been missed. For example, her own lived experience primed her to the pervasive threat of violent crime, but also to probing participants about the presence of community-based resources (e.g., the police) that could mitigate that threat.

Context

The study we report is affiliated to the XX study (blinded for review). XX investigates the resilience of youth (aged 14-24 years) in stressed environments, with particular emphasis on communities affected by extractive and other industries (Authors, 2021). Accordingly, we chose the stressed industrialised environment of Matsapha.

Matsapha is a town located within the Manzini region of Eswatini. It harbours close to 95% of the country's textile and manufacturing industries (Jeppesen & Bezuidenhout, 2019).

Most of these industries run for 24 hours a day, to promote an unending cycle of productivity. Unfortunately, the 24hr emission of toxic gases, noise and waste takes its toll on the 35 000 residents, who mostly live in informal settlements within a 1150ha radius (Makadzange et al., 2018). Lately, Matsapha has also been the centre of pro-democracy riots, arson attacks, and revenge killings (Dlamini, 2022).

Matsapha residents are mostly young people aged 19-35 (City Facts, 2020). This youth demographic reflects the rural to urban migration that characterises Eswatini, with large numbers of younger Swazis hoping for employment in the industrialised environment. Young people are also attracted by educational opportunities as Eswatini's biggest university, the University of Eswatini (formerly known as the University of Swaziland), is located in Matsapha.

The Swazis living in Matsapha typically subscribe to traditional African values. Typically, Swazi culture embraces the traditional African valuing of spirituality, collectivism or interdependence, tolerance, and patriarchy (Mkhatswa, 2015; Nyawo, 2018).

Participants

Emerging adult participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. To be eligible for participation, young people needed to be 18 to 24 years old. While emerging adulthood spans a broader period (i.e., 18-29; Arnett, 2000), the XX study (blinded for review) capped participant eligibility at 24 years (Authors, 2021). Further, participants needed to have stayed in Matsapha (specifically in the neighbourhoods of Kwaluseni, Mbhuleni, or Mathangeni) for at least twelve months prior to the study. These neighbourhoods were not only located closest to industries/tertiary institutions, but they were also populated by larger numbers of emerging adults. They were also prone to the typical challenges associated with stressed environments (e.g., crime, overcrowding, pollution, and

poor service delivery; Dlamini, 2021). Additionally, participants needed to be willing to share their experiences --be they negative or positive – of living in these areas. They also needed to be English literate.

These criteria were advertised on flyers that were placed in local shops and on the University of Eswatini notice boards. Only nine emerging adults responded. We thus enlisted the help of four gatekeepers known to NG (i.e., a member of the local residents' patrol, two landlords who were in regular contact with emerging adult tenants, and a soccer coach). They advertised the study to emerging adults by pointing out the flyers and telling them about the study. With the gatekeepers' input, and the use of snowball sampling methods, 21 additional participants volunteered.

All 30 participants were Swazis, and their native language was Siswati. The young men (*n* = 15; average age: 22) were mostly unemployed (*n* = 10). One was employed as a factory worker; one was a self-employed musician. Three were upgrading their Form 5 studies (final year of schooling). All the young men socialised by playing sporting activities, such as soccer. None mentioned that they were fathers.

Fifteen young women (average age: 21) participated. Compared to the young men, most young women were pursuing tertiary studies (*n* =8). Three were unemployed; 3 were upgrading/completing high school qualifications, and one was employed in a factory. Only two young women had children (both reported teenage pregnancies).

Ethics

The XX study received ethical clearance from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of XX (ref: blinded). The same committee extended that clearance to the current study (ref: blinded). The Matsapha Town Council also granted permission for empirical worked to be conducted (ref: blinded).

Data generation

Data generation process. In keeping with the interpretivist epistemology that informed this study (Creswell, 2007), RTA's emphasis on the importance of detailed, rich data (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and calls for resilience studies that foreground young people's insights (Theron et al., 2021), we used conversational and participatory methods to generate data. Further, in keeping with traditional African preference for discursive opportunities and group dialogue, participants formed three groups. Each group engaged in three data generation activities: focus group interviews, participatory mapping, and photo elicitation. These activities took place in local venues that were conveniently accessible to the participants.

Group composition varied across the three activities. Each focus group had 10 participants (5 young men and 5 young women). Group members generally knew one another to a greater or lesser extent (e.g., they were friends, acquaintances, or recognised one another from living in the same neighbourhood). To complete the participatory mapping and photo elicitation activities, participants split into six sex-specific smaller groups (group size: 5). The change in group composition related to participant preference. After the focus groups, participants explained that they would prefer sex-specific groups as they thought same sex peers would relate better to their lived experiences.

The first author (NG), who is fluent in Siswati, facilitated the activities in a mix of English and Siswati. English is a second language in Eswatini and typically used in formal and group related settings. In personal and/or informal settings, Swazi citizens generally use a mix of English and Siswati. With participants' explicit permission, NG audio recorded the activities; she also transcribed them and translated the Siswati parts. She invited a peer (a teacher fluent in English and Siswati) to independently verify the translations (i.e., listen to the recordings and compare their content with translated transcriptions). The peer found no inconsistencies.

Focus group interviews. Focus groups are an interviewing strategy where a researcher invites participants to collectively share views of how they perceive a particular phenomenon (Adler et al, 2019). This data generation method allowed us to understand emerging adults' experiences of the stressed industrialised environment and what enabled resilience to that stress in a discursive and unthreatening manner. NG began with a broad introduction: 'I am interested in understanding how living in Matsapha has impacted your lives and how you manage those impacts. Your accounts matter to me so please feel free to share your experiences'. Then NG asked a series of open-ended questions about the risks faced within Matsapha, and how young people managed those risks. She probed participants' responses using prompts such as "please help me understand why…" and "are there any examples that you can use to elaborate on this…". These probes enabled emerging adult participants to share their perspectives of risk and resilience in more detail. Each focus group lasted 60-70 minutes.

Participatory mapping. Participatory mapping is a data generation method that helps groups of research participants to co-construct knowledge about spaces and places with the aid of maps (Forrester & Cinderby, 2011). NG provided the groups with maps showing an aerial view of Matsapha. Once she had ascertained that participants understood how to read a map, she requested them to identify places/spaces that contributed to the risks they experienced, how they managed those risks, and to mark them on the maps. Once participants felt they had exhausted marking these maps, she joined them for a discussion of their marked-up maps. The aim of this discussion was to gain a deeper understanding of how the marked-up spaces/places played into emerging adult risk and resilience. To that end, NG asked various questions, including: "What is stressful about the places/spaces that you identified as risky?" and "What is helpful about the places/spaces that you identified as supporting your management of risks?" These discussions lasted 50-55 minutes. With participants'

agreement, NG kept the maps they had marked so she could have a pictorial reference when transcribing the participatory mapping interviews. These maps were also photographed for backup purposes.

Photo elicitation. Photo elicitation is a data generation method that uses images (typically photos) to support an interview process (Harper, 2002). Emerging adult participants captured/shared their own images, using their cellular phones. Prior to meeting as a group, they were invited to capture 10 images that represented typical risks they faced in Matsapha and who/what supported resilience to those risks. These images elicited a conversation about risk and resilience. NG used the following prompts to guide this conversation: "What do your photos show about the risks that you or other Swazi emerging adults routinely face in Matsapha and how you/they adjust well to those risks?" and "If you had to choose three pictures that give important information about how you or other Swazi emerging adults adjust well to those risks, which ones would you choose and how come?" These activities lasted between 40-50 minutes. With participant permission, NG kept copies of their photographs for easy reference during the analysis and for anonymised use in dissemination of study findings.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

Two questions informed the data analysis: how do emerging adults explain the risks of living in Matsapha; and, what enables the resilience of emerging adults within the stressed industrialised environment? NG sought initial answers to these questions by inductively and iteratively analysing the data and identifying related patterns (i.e., themes). Following Braun and Clarke (2022), she reflected on the assumptions she brought to the study and familiarised herself with all transcripts and visual data. This enabled a nuanced and complex understanding of the data. Next, she carefully assigned codes to segments that answered the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Trainor & Bundon, 2021); during this process she

was thoughtful and chose codes that paraphrased how that segment answered a research question (i.e., she considered what paraphrase best fit the data rather than choosing from a list of codes as is common in a codebook approach). As part of the search for themes, she thoughtfully conflated codes that shared meaning/a central idea. She considered how the data triangulated (i.e., she searched across visual and narrative data for similar thematic patterns) and was encouraged by the congruence in thematic patterns across the types of data. This contemplative approach is typical of RTA (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021).

Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight the need for researchers using RTA to constantly reflect on their experience and prior knowledge and how this plays into their research. For this reason, NG invited independent scrutiny of the anonymised data set and her analysis (i.e., the thematic patterns that she had identified) from an experienced researcher in Eswatini. She used their feedback to reflect further on how her SETR-informed assumptions about resilience and familiarity with Matsapha played into how she had probed participant responses and the meaning she had made of their accounts. This reflexivity made her appreciate how her theoretical and situated (i.e., experiential) knowledge supported her to recognise nuances in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and to use them to provide a rich, insightful account of what enabled emerging adult resilience in the stressed context of Matsapha.

The second author (LT) critically considered the identified themes, infusing her two decades of research-informed understanding of African youth resilience into her interpretation of the themes. Put differently, she brought her research-informed knowledge and lived experience to bear on the meaning she made of the thematic patterns NG had identified (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). NG and LT then engaged in consensus discussions about these reflections. This prompted some re-engagement with the data, mirroring the iterative, non-linear essence of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019), and refinement of the themes.

For example, in their discussion of the risks that characterised Matsapha, they realised that emerging adults experienced these risks as unavoidable. Hence, they redefined the initial theme of 'stressed environment' to 'Matsapha is an unavoidable stressed environment'. This contemplative approach, and openness to revision of their interpretations, suggested commitment to a trustworthy data analysis process.

Results

For emerging adult participants, Matsapha was an unavoidable environment in which physical, financial, and relational stressors were rife. Nevertheless, they drew on enabling connections, personal drive, and a resourced ecology; this resource mix helped them to beat the odds of Matsapha (i.e., to manage Matsapha's unavoidable stressors). Each of these themes (i.e., Matsapha is an unavoidable stressed environment; Beating the odds of Matsapha) is detailed next.

Matsapha is an unavoidable stressed environment

Emerging adults typically reported that living in Matsapha was not optional for them. They were either there because of further education and training or because of Matsapha's potential to facilitate economic independence. They communicated that employment prospects in Eswatini were slim, but more likely in industrialized environments like Matsapha. Hence, like Participant 3, a 20-year-old young man said, many participants considered Matsapha and its challenges to be unavoidable: "The truth is we don't have a choice … most people are uncomfortable being here, they are just here to be paid".

All 30 emerging adults reported experiences of multiple stressors. Put differently, they described their daily environment as a stressed environment. This included physical challenges (e.g., pollution, overcrowding, and sanitation), economic challenges (e.g., unemployment, underemployment) and relational challenges (e.g., sexual abuse, crime,

gangs). Participants pointed out typical locations of the sources of these challenges (see Figure1). In addition, the photographs they shared included many examples of their degraded and degrading physical environments (see Figures 2 & 3).

Emerging adults were especially concerned about how exposure to pollution compromised their health (e.g., asthma, sinusitis, or insomnia). For instance, Participant 1, a 21-year-old young man, said: “Air pollution is bad. Sometimes it smells very bad at the Brewery, the fumes are too much. Those who have sinusitis are affected and really our government is not doing anything about it. The more you get closer, it becomes unbearable”. Similarly, when referring to noise pollution, Participant 18, a 20-year-young woman said,

> Noise pollution is another issue we face in this area. We can’t sleep because of the sound of the machines at the night. They make a lot of noise, they run all night and during the day they’re even doing the same thing.

Figure 1

Map of Matsapha showing risky locations (written in red by young men in Group 1)

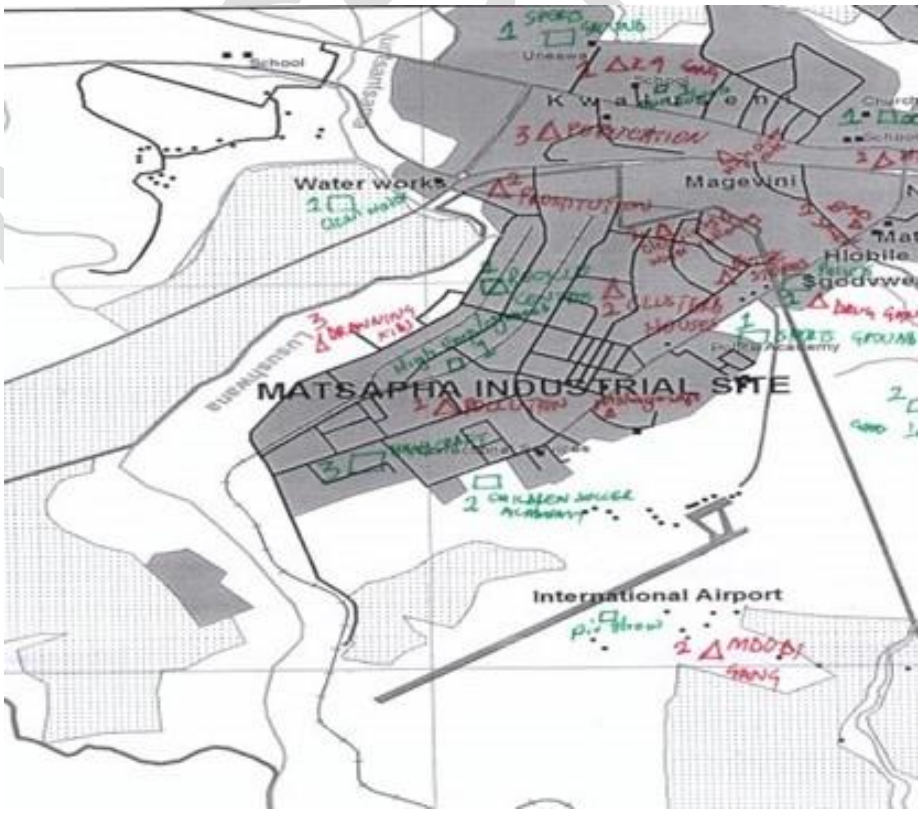

Figure 2

Participant 24's image of a makeshift toilet

Figure 3

Participant 6's image of land pollution in their neighbourhood

Relational stressors caused a lot of anxiety for emerging adults and challenged their freedom of movement. For example, the proliferation of violent gangs, referred to as the "K9s", contributed to emerging adults living in fear of being mugged or violated, and curtailed their mobility. Again, there was a strong sense that these threats were not easily avoidable. To that end, Participant 19 (a 19-year-old young woman) reported: "It's not easy

to move around this place. There are too many gangsters and if you are a girl, you are at risk of being raped and robbed. Unfortunately, you can't even defend yourself from these things". In the mapping exercise, participants could pinpoint crime 'hotspots', but added that these could not be avoided easily because their livelihood depended on being in Matsapha.

Participants also experienced financial precarity and financial exploitation, even though so many hoped that Matsapha would potentiate financial independence. For instance, Participant 5, a 23-year-old young woman, said*:*

> Most managers in the factories do not appreciate the workers because they know there's a bigger pool to choose from. They exploit these people and use principles of capitalism because they know people are desperate. If for instance you can't work for E1, 200 [R1, 200] then someone else will most definitely do. So, people are paid low salaries. Some people work for as little as E800 [R800] for the whole month. This is a place where people just survive, they don't live. If you don't do well on the job, they just fire you straight away… The working conditions are bad. A lot of people suffer economically. They can't even buy enough food for themselves.

In short, this stressed environment challenged their health, wellbeing, and development. To manage these stressors, required personal, relational, and contextual resources (as presaged by SETR, Ungar, 2011). Together, these resources supported emerging adults to beat the odds of Matsapha.

Beating the odds of Matsapha requires a resource mix

Beating the odds of Matsapha drew on three resilience-enabling supports: personal drive, enabling connections and a resourced ecology. We detail each of these resilience-enabling supports next.

Personal drive

Most emerging adults (i.e., 25 of the 30) reported being personally driven to survive the hardship of Matsapha. Being driven to survive meant accepting that living in Matsapha

required that emerging adults make peace with, or tolerate, its challenges. Typically, this meant that emerging adults approached challenges they had no personal control over with an "it's fine" mind-set and then endured those challenges. In that regard, Participant 1 (21-year-old young man) and Participant 17 (a 23-year-old young woman) said:

> Human bodies are strange because they adjust; more like a resistance kind of thing. Like in Big Bend [an industrial area] there's always burning sugar cane smell, but those people, I tell you, they feel like its fresh air. Same applies to here, we are just used to it. Sometimes you wake up at night and you hear the smell getting in your room [but] you just inhale and say to yourself 'Ah, that's Brewery' and go back to sleep.
>
> I would honestly be lying if I were to say these problems are still challenges. They have become part of us, we no longer consider them as challenges. Like if my neighbour is having a party, I'll do my own things and act as if I am in my own world because I can't focus on what everyone else is doing. I just survive like that. I accept that these problems are part of life [here] and learn to live with them. It no longer affects me in any way.

Being driven to survive also meant young people were future oriented. Specifically, their personal drive was rooted in envisioning a future that was better than the life they were currently living in Matsapha. Often, this vision was animated and/or sustained by other young people who seemed to be doing well. For example, Participant 6, an 18-year-old young woman, said:

> There is the University of Eswatini very close by. I'm inspired by those that go there. I wish one day I can be like them so that I can also have the allowance that they get. Even their way of life is enviable. So, it gives me hope that one day I will be like them as well

Achieving this future life meant emerging adults needed to be goal-directed and adopt behaviours that would facilitate their dreams for a better future. Implicitly, doing so also required access to related infrastructure and supports. For instance, unemployed young men hoped that honing their soccer skills would potentiate a career in soccer and were grateful for sports fields where they could practice. As participant 3, a 20-year-old young man, said:

"Sometimes football ends up being a career for us, it opens up opportunities. So practising is good because you never know [if] one day a big team will recruit you and you will have a career as a soccer player". Emerging adults who were engaged in education also regulated their behaviour in support of the futures they hoped for. For instance, Participant 27, a 23-year-old young man, said: "One has to get their priorities straight and know what goals they want to achieve in life. So, I keep to my books to ensure that one day I achieve my goals".

Surviving Matsapha also demanded emerging adults' resourcefulness and industriousness. Emerging adults worked hard and were seldom idle (they "hustled").Their inclination to hustle (i.e., try by all means to make a living) related to their belief that they were personally responsible for their survival. For instance, Participant 30, a 19-year-old young man said, "There are people like vendors who sell food by the factories there. Even though they don't necessarily work inside the factories, they … get a chance to make money." Similarly, Participant 28, a 20-year-old young man said:

> Let's take for instance a case where you struggle to get a job – a lot of people here have opened mini-markets [see Figure 4] to provide the food and shelter as the others have already highlighted. For me that shows people's willingness to push and not sit back. They do something to make sure life continues.

Figure 4

Participant 5's image of a mini-market

Not all emerging adults "hustled" in conventional ways. Some reported that their peers sometimes used unconventional means to survive Matsapha, but that these unconventional means were typically tolerated by the community. Unconventional hustling typically included sex work and/or engaging in a transactional sexual relationship with someone who was older and capable of providing material or financial support. For example, two 19-year-old young women recounted:

> There's some lady who was victimised about prostitution. Her response was that she did not care about what other people said; all she cared about was putting food on the table. This for me shows that people have become numb to the problems that they're facing and how they go about solving them. So, it's more like, 'Oh the prostitutes are here now, they are looking for money', and that's become normal (Participant 22)
>
> Here in Matsapha, you get to understand that some people cope by having 'blessers'. Most males see females as people they can use. They know that they can always flash money at you because of your prevailing circumstances and use that to their advantage to get you to have sex with them (Participant 21)

Enabling connections

While talking about how they managed life in Matsapha, many participants (24 of the 30) spoke of the benefits of having positive (i.e., enabling) connections. These connections included friends, family (immediate and extended), members of faith-based communities that emerging adults were part of, and spiritual beings (specifically, the Christian god). Interestingly, only one young person reported a romantic connection as enabling.

Young people experienced that connecting to God (via religious acts such as prayer or church attendance) or their faith-based community helped them to make hopeful meaning and sustained their future focus. Participant 6, a 19-year-old young woman, illustrated this when she said:

> All things are possible with God. You see we don't all come from the same backgrounds. Everyone has a story to tell, some of us are needy; we don't have people to ask for help from. We have no one to lean on. So, all we do is pray and God will answer.

Members of their faith-based community encouraged them to make health- and wellbeing-promoting choices, thereby keeping them safe from risky behaviours. For instance, when pointing to enabling locations during the mapping activity, Participant 27 (23-year-old young man) said: "Attending church services teaches us about morals and preserves us from engaging in the many criminal activities happening around here".

Family and friends also contributed to emerging adults' safety, in that criminals and sexual predators were less likely to take advantage of young people who were in the company of their family or friends. Young women and young men reported this protective effect. For instance:

> When I go to school [university], I must make sure that I'm early because I always have to pass by that place [high crime spot]. If I'm late, I have to take a winding route … [or] my mom accompanies me. She leaves her work and makes sure she waits with me by the bus stop because she can't leave me alone there (Participant 25, 20-year-old woman)

> You have to be alert, be on guard, and surround yourself with friends that can help you in the event of crime around here (Participant 30, 19-year-old man)

Family (immediate and extended) and friends also made everyday life in Matsapha easier by helping emerging adults cope with financial challenges. For instance, Participant 5 (a 23-year-old woman) said shared a photograph of another young woman and explained: "She is my friend and [like] my sister. So, every time I'm in trouble or I need money or food I can always go to her". Similarly, Participant 7, a 23-year-old young woman, shared a photograph of herself at home [see Figure 5] and said,

> This picture shows me at home. It makes me feel better. I'm able to ask for things that I need from my parents. I don't always have to ask for everything from my parents though,

there's more people to ask for help from. I also ask for money from my uncles. I never go to bed hungry, and it makes me feel better.

Friends (and in a few instances, family members) also made life easier with their willingness to provide emotional support. They willingly listened to emerging adults as they vented frustrations about Matsapha-related problems, empathized with them, and advised them where necessary. Their emotional support made the daily stressors bearable. As illustrated next, this applied to both young men and young women.

> My friends take out the stress in my life. I love them. They help me. The talking nonstop is nice. We share our problems and most often find that we have similar issues. Then we are able to strategize on how best to solve those problems. We also in the process give each other advice like, for instance, telling each other not to rely on boys for comfort because they won't help us. Instead we do more recreational activities that will ultimately make us smile, even if what was causing you stress has not changed, you are able to see it from a different light and thus minimise the stress (Participant 18, 20-year-old woman)

> It also helps to have relationships with friends so that you can talk and deal with the issues. You can't successfully live alone in Matsapha. You can't make it…you just can't make it. (Participant 1, 21-year-old man)

Figure 5

Participant 7's image of spending time with family members at home

A resourced ecology

Despite the countless stressors that were synonymous with life in Matsapha, many emerging adults (i.e., 24 of the 30) referred to Matsapha as being a place with facilities and services (see green entries in figure 1). These contextual resources helped them cope with the physical, financial, and relational stresses they faced. In part, these resources were helpful because they were within reach and offered affordable goods/services. For example, Participant 9, a 24-year-old young man, said,

> There are too many hospitals around here. This is probably to keep up with the demand of people that are located in vicinities of Matsapha. So, when a person is not feeling well, they don't even need a car to get clinical help. It helps us because the nurses are qualified and the medication is of a good standard and affordable.

As emphasized in the mapping activity, young people also experienced their ecology as helpfully resourced because there were opportunities for recreational activities that provided time out. This helped emerging adults to relax, de-stress, and have constructive downtime with their peers. Young men and young women appreciated opportunities for time out:

> I keep myself busy by going to the soccer field to help other people with football because for now, I'm struggling with school issues. Soccer keeps me going. It helps me come back home tired and that way I just sleep on arrival (Participant 13, 23-year-old man)
>
> I just avoid everything by playing games such as cards or go and sweat in the playground. And, that way, I forget about the problems (Participant 9, 24-year-old man)
>
> There's a sports-field up there next to the sports emporium. We jog in the mornings around 4-5Am and in the afternoons with my roommates. When you jog in the morning, you start you day right. Your mind opens up and makes you feel healthier. And besides even though we are subjected to the dirty water situation, jogging releases digestive enzymes and process some of the bacteria and that makes you feel better, I think. (Participant 20, 19-year-old woman)

Finally, emerging adults experienced their ecology as helpfully resourced, because it included reliable and competent security services (i.e., the police force affiliated to a large, local police academy and 'community police' or neighbourhood residents who patrolled their neighbourhood). Their availability meant that emerging adults could easily access security-related help and felt safer (see Figure 6). For instance, Participant 28, a 28-year-old man, said:

> Then there's the Police Academy. This is where they train police. So, people around there are protected by well-trained police officers. It's thus not easy for people to drink there and there's less crime because they know that there are police close by. So, it makes us feel safe.

Figure 6

Participant 12's image of the police force aiding a resident

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study reported in this article was to explore emerging adults' accounts of resilience to the challenges of a stressed industrialized environment in Eswatini. Said differently, the study was focused on "participants' contextually situated experiences, perspectives, and behaviors" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8) that made it possible for them to manage the stressors that characterised Matsapha, a stressed, industrialized town in Eswatini (Magagula, 2022). While African young people's insights are generally under-represented in the developmental and resilience literature (Blum & Boyden, 2018), Swazi emerging adult accounts of resilience have never been documented. Our study remedies this oversight.

The insights of the 30 emerging adults who shared their lived experiences of Matsapha's risks, and resilience to those risks, fit social ecological or systemic accounts of resilience. As presaged by SETR (Ungar, 2011), emerging adult resilience to the physical, economic, and emotional stressors that characterised their experience of Matsapha was a mix of personal, relational, and contextual resources (i.e., personal drive, enabling connections, and accessible and affordable ecological resources). While some aspects of this resource mix were "ordinary" (Masten, 2014) or commonplace, others directed attention to the complexity of resilience. In other words, the insights of the Swazi participants were a timely reminder that developmental stage and situational and cultural context influence how resilience plays out (Masten et al., 2021;Ungar & Theron, 2020).

Commonplace resilience enablers. In our study, emerging adult resilience to Matsapha's multiple challenges was supported by resilience enablers that have previously been associated with young people's internal capacities and their social and physical environment (Masten, 2014; Panter-Brick, 2015; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). In this sense, these enablers seemed commonplace or typical. As in these previous studies, emerging adult participants' personal drive included agentic determination to survive the challenges of the stressed industrialised environment (e.g., by hustling), their hope for a better future, and tolerant responses. These

intrinsic strengths are well-documented resilience enablers (Masten, 2014), also in systematic reviews of African youth resilience (Theron, 2020; Van Breda & Theron, 2018).

Navigating to available extrinsic (i.e., relational and ecological) resources – that were meaningful (Ungar, 2011) – also helped young people manage Matsapha-associated challenges. Emerging adults' relational resources were mostly connections with family, friends (and in one instance, romantic partners), spiritual beings (the Christian God) and their faith-based community. These fit with studies that report that supportive, informal social networks are facilitative of the resilience of the youth (e.g., Abukari, 2018; Masten, 2014; Panter-Brick, 2015). Likewise, the protective role of the relationship that emerging adult participants had with God and church-going others is well documented in African studies of youth resilience (e.g., Loewenthal, 2007; Theron, 2011, 2020; Thwala et al., 2018; Van Breda & Theron, 2018).

As reported elsewhere (Ungar & Theron, 2020), the physical ecology mattered too. Access to clinics, retail services, libraries, recreational space, and reliable, competent security services bolstered participating emerging adults' capacity to cope well with Matsapha's challenges. As in other studies (e.g., Theron et al., 2022), these ecological resources were meaningful to emerging adult participant resilience because they were affordable, geographically proximate (i.e., accessible), and reliably available.

Complex resilience enablers. Many of the resources that emerging adult participants reported highlighted the complexity of resilience in that they were developmentally appropriate. They also showed responsiveness to situational and cultural dynamics. These aspects are under-reported in the resilience literature (Masten et al., 2021).

Emerging adulthood is a time when young people typically assert their independence and explore whom they might want to be as adults (Salvatore, 2018). Achieving related goals – in

contextually responsive ways (e.g., Singh & Naicker, 2019) – is similarly key. Swazi emerging adult participants' drive to survive Matsapha, aspire to upward future trajectories, and related goal-directed behaviours (e.g., academic diligence, commitment to a sport and related career aspirations), fit well with this developmental imperative.

The sources of relational support that participants reported, and how these connections enabled resilience to Matsapha challenges, also fit emerging adulthood. For instance, emerging adults' need to rely on family and friends for material support was commensurate with Arnett's (2003) assertions of how low-level jobs (starter jobs), typical of transition into adulthood, leave young people unable to fully fund their lifestyles. Likewise, turning to peers (rather than family) for emotional support is a typical trend in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007; Arnett, 2014; Arnett, 2015; Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017). Simultaneously, these relational supports were a timely reminder that even though emerging adulthood embraces individuality and independence, emerging adult resilience continues to benefit from important others and ecological supports (Ungar, 2019; Yoon et al., 2021).

Further, and as presaged by resilience scholars who have reported the complexity of resilience (Masten et al, 2021; Theron et al., 2021, 2022; Ungar, 2011), the resilience enablers that Swazi emerging adult participants reported, reflected the situational context of Matsapha. For instance, hustling (as a specific form of agency) was probably a response to sparse employment opportunities and underemployment. In the absence of hustling, their financial precarity would likely have been worse. Further, hustling was likely necessitated by the ailing Swazi economy and limitations to parents' capacity to provide financial support (Dlamini, 2020), coupled with the fact that HIV/AIDS has orphaned many Swazi emerging adults (Makufa et al., 2017; Mkhatswa, 2017). Other studies of emerging adult resilience in stressed South African environments have similarly theorised that personal agency (including

hustling) is more prominent in situations where parents are financially constrained and/or not available to support their children (Theron et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2022).

Following SETR (Ungar, 2011), the unconventional or atypical forms of hustling mentioned by Swazi emerging adults– like sex work and consensual, transactional sexual relationships with older adults ('blessers') – must also be understood in situational context. Taken out of context, these agentic behaviours may not be understood as a viable means of managing the significant financial stress that was integral to emerging adults' experience of Matsapha. While these forms of agency are ambiguous in that they could result in harm to young people's health and wellbeing (Cavazzoni et. al, 2021), the poverty that permeates industrial communities (such as Matsapha) could easily have reduced young people's options for more socially acceptable solutions to the economic challenges they faced (Ufuophu-Biri, 2014). These riskier forms of hustling would fit with Rafael et al.'s (2019) concerns that non-facilitative environments – i.e., environments that do nothing/too little to support youth resilience and/or limit the capacity of informal social ecologies (e.g., peer networks, family) to co-facilitate youth resilience – are complicit in young people's choice of atypical resilience strategies.

Finally, the alignment between Swazi culture and how young people accounted for resilience to Matsapha's stressors also advanced understanding of the complexity of resilience. Broadly understood, the Swazi culture embraces the traditional African valuing of spirituality, peaceful interdependence, and tolerance (Mkhatswa, 2015; Nyawo, 2018). Emerging adults' willingness to tolerate the challenging circumstances within Matsapha, albeit in the short term while they worked to change their circumstances, was likely influenced by these Swazi cultural values. In ascribing to these values, Swazis are encouraged to coexist respectfully and accept unpleasant circumstances so as not to distress the collective (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). As in other studies of African youth resilience

(Theron, 2020; Theron & Van Breda, 2021), respectful interdependence was also seen in emerging adults' experience of enabling others' generous sharing of material resources, emotional support, and time to keep one another physically safe. As per the African philosophy of Ubuntu, Africans are traditionally expected to be considerate to the needs of those around them (Sekudu, 2019). Of course, emerging adults' references to crime, violence, and employers taking advantage of desperate job seekers, prompts questions about the wider enactment of respectful interdependence in Matsapha. It is also a reminder that cultural values may change, thereby necessitating other pathways of resilience (Panter-Brick, 2015).

Overall, as our findings nudge attention to the complexity of resilience, they introduce a cautionary take-home message for those who wish to champion the resilience of Swazi emerging adults. In the absence of equitable opportunities and developmentally and contextually apposite resources that are purposefully facilitated by emerging adults' ecology, young people's capacity for resilience will suffer. If the social and physical ecology – including institutional and government role players – fail to provide the resources necessary for emerging adults to realise the futures they aspire to, then they should not be surprised when emerging adults are vulnerable to psychological distress and/or engage in risky behaviours or atypical pathways of resilience (Singh & Naicker, 2019; Theron et al., 2021). Likewise, if the ecology does not proactively sustain the relational and ecological resources that emerging adults value, then emerging adult resilience is likely to suffer. On a more positive note, enabling and sustaining apposite resources is doable, more especially if ecologies respect emerging adult insights about which resources are developmentally and contextually meaningful. In Africa, where the youth population is increasing at an exponential rate and their resilience is crucial (Mitchell, 2021; Theron, 2020), this message must be heeded.

Limitations

The study we report relied on three data generation methods that required young people to participate for about a month. Keeping them committed for this period was challenging (particularly as temporary employment opportunities necessarily took priority). For example, whereas all 30 participated in the focus groups, only 25 were available to participate in subsequent photo elicitation activities. Participant engagement might have been better sustained had we arranged for all three activities to be on one day or consecutive days. Further, even though the three activities took place over a four-week period, our study was essentially cross-sectional. Cross sectional studies are limited in that they do not trace the evolution of participants' experiences and what enables/constrains resilience over time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Given the fluidity of culture (Panter-Brick et al., 2015), a longitudinal study would have allowed deeper insight into the role of cultural values in emerging adult resilience in Eswatini and related complexities. Finally, the study only considered the perspective of Swazi emerging adults. While this redressed the historic inattention to their insights, it does not provide a comprehensive or multi-perspective view. A follow-up study that invites multiple role-player perspectives (e.g., Authors, 2021), also overtime (Wojciak et al., 2022), would address these limitations and provide better insight into the complexity of emerging adult resilience in a stressed industrialised environment.

Implications of the study

Our study nudges attention to how industrialised environments, like Matsapha, can become unavoidable destinations when emerging adults seek education and employment. Simultaneously, they are stressed environments that are likely to challenge the health and wellbeing of these young people. Following from SETR, the social and physical ecology matters for the resilience of young people (Ungar, 2011). Stressed environments must, therefore, be transformed into more enabling environments. In the case of the emerging adults in our study, this should include maintaining the resources that they report as

supportive of their resilience (e.g., enabling connections; accessible, affordable facilities) as well as redressing environmental stressors that impact their developmental milestones (e.g., inadequate opportunity for decent work). While these insights are likely transferable to other industrialised communities, they ideally need to engage local emerging adults to better understand which resources would be most helpful to them (Theron et al., 2021).

Furthermore, and as presaged by SETR (Ungar, 2011), our study underscores that emerging adult resilience requires a mix of resources that transcends personal assets. Following from this, it prompts key role-players (e.g., policy makers; service providers; mental health practitioners) to better acquaint themselves with the developmentally and contextually relevant processes that promote positive adaptation among emerging adults. This would allow role-players to optimally champion emerging adult resilience. This is important because young people cannot be expected to be resilient on their own (Masten, 2014), even when they are in the emerging adult phase (Yoon et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This article redresses the inattention to the resilience of emerging adults in Eswatini. In reporting exploratory insights into what enables emerging adult resilience in the stressed Swazi context of Matsapha, the article also reinforces the need for attention to what is potentially developmentally and contextually/culturally distinct about the resources that matter for resilience (Masten et al., 2021). Given Africa's fast growing youth population, it will be important to sustain this attention. Most importantly, perhaps, this article showed that even though emerging adulthood is typically synonymous with gaining functional independence, emerging adult resilience is not an independent or "DIY" (do-it-yourself) job (Ungar, 2019). To further support the resilience of emerging adults in Matsapha, and other stressed environments in sub-Saharan Africa, it will be imperative to honour this insight and

advocate for emerging adult resilience to be theorised and operationalized as a co-facilitated process that is shared by emerging adults and their social ecologies.

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