

“Sunny side and/or shady side?”: The living conditions and resilience of elderly Sunnyside residents

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This article describes the experiences relating to the living conditions of a sample of older people residing in Sunnyside, Tshwane. Based on their narratives and the meanings they attach to their living conditions in Sunnyside, this article concludes that this suburb has both a sunny and a shady side for the elderly. Their view of and approach to life, as well as their resilience enable the elderly to deal with the shady side of Sunnyside. Contrary to what might have been expected, the advantages relating to the sunny side of their suburb appear to transcend the disadvantages of its shady side.

Die lewensomstandighede en veerkragtigheid van die ouer inwoners van Sunnyside

Die artikel beskryf 'n groep bejaarde persone se ervarings rondom hul lewensomstandighede in Sunnyside, Tshwane. Vanuit die deelnemers se vertellinge en die betekenis wat hulle heg aan hulle lewensomstandighede in Sunnyside is daar tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat Sunnyside vir dié groep bejaardes beide 'n son- en 'n skadukant het. Die manier waarop die deelnemers na die lewe kyk en dit benader en die veerkragtigheid wat hulle demonstreer bemagtig hulle om die skadukant van Sunnyside te hanteer. In teenstelling met wat verwag sou word, lyk dit asof die voordele verbonde aan die sonkant die skadukant van die woonbuurt oorheers.

*Prof A H (Nicky) Alpaslan, Dept of Social Work, University of South Africa,
P O Box 392, Unisa 0030; E-mail: alpasab@unisa.ac.za*



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Sunnyside, an inner-city suburb of Tshwane, was established as a hamlet in 1875 and incorporated into the municipal area of Pretoria in 1888 (Donaldson *et al* 2003: 23).¹ In the 1890s Sunnyside was described as:

... wild en romanties [...] nog bijna geheel in natuurstaat [...] Hoogten met gras bedekt, groepjes mimosa's en ander wilden bome, hier en daar een oude huizie, schilderagticht en afgezonderd gelegen – dat was al men er zag (Naude 1994: 15).²

In *Die kerk aan die sonkant* Le Roux (1992: 9) mentions that while Arcadia is the oldest suburb in the city of Tshwane, Sunnyside is the second oldest. The name Sunnyside is derived from the fact that this suburb was known as the “sunny side” of Pretoria and with the Apies River (in and around 1875) forming the eastern border of the Pretoria (*cf* Rousseau 2002: 5), Sunnyside was a popular picnic spot for the white population at the time. The Sunnyside of yesteryear was a much sought after suburb in which several well-known South Africans resided, among whom poets such as Jan F Cilliers and Louis Leipoldt, and political leaders such as Generals C F Beyers, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts (Le Roux 1992: 9). In the 1960s many of the original houses were demolished and apartment buildings were erected, thus increasing the population (Naude 1994: 14). Referring to the present-day Sunnyside, Donaldson *et al* (2003: 11) note that this suburb has the highest percentage of residential units among the suburbs of the inner city and lies between Reitz and Park Streets, Jameson and Kirkness Streets, Nelson Mandela Boulevard and Kotze and Jeppe Streets. Schenck (2008: 2) delimits the borders of the present-day Sunnyside as follows:

- 1 The researcher would like to acknowledge the contribution of the following fourth-year student social workers who acted as fieldworkers and who assisted with the analysis of the data: Prudence Bhengu, Suzanne Booyzen, Ammeta Govender, Cathy McClean, Cathy McNamara, Lebohang Moloi, Mandy Stokes and Heilie van der Merwe.
- 2 wild and romantic [...] still in its natural state [...] covered in high grass and groups of mimosa and other trees dotted the landscape. The only thing one could see here and there was a solitary old and beautiful little house.

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The central business district of Tshwane serves as the border on the western side of Sunnyside. The suburb of Arcadia is on the northern side comprising mostly flats and businesses. On the eastern side Sunnyside borders on the Loftus Versfeld rugby stadium and the University of Pretoria, and on the south, Muckleneuk, an affluent residential area, and the University of South Africa. Sunnyside is centrally located in terms of a number of easily accessible businesses, resources and training institutions. It consists mainly of residential houses, high-density areas with apartment buildings, and the business centre.

The following question arises: Who were the inhabitants of the Sunnyside of yesteryear and who resides in the present-day Sunnyside?

Roodnat (2007: 25) answers this question by mentioning that Sunnyside used to be “a white neighbourhood” in the days of apartheid. Currently it is populated by mostly non-white African inhabitants whom she terms the “new black middle class”. In interviews conducted with landlords in Sunnyside she estimates that 70%-80% of inhabitants are employed by government and that 5%-10% are students. She notes that it was difficult to judge the percentage of student inhabitants as the majority of them were minors and their guardians signed their lease agreements. She also comments that it was difficult to provide accurate figures regarding foreigners occupying flats, as there were numerous unregistered sublettings and illegal occupation of flats by immigrants. Mawadza (2008: 6) confirms the presence of migrants in Sunnyside by referring to

... known establishments that are used by migrants as premises for forging documents (temporary asylum papers and ID documents). These include some of the approximately 43 hair salons located along Esselen Street in Sunnyside [...] These salons are all owned by African migrants and are open until late at night despite an apparent lack of business.

The topic of the present article is one of the inhabitant groups in Sunnyside, namely the older persons, with the emphasis on their experiences relating to their living conditions in present-day Sunnyside and the resilience they demonstrate in relation to their living conditions.

This investigation is prompted first by the strong visible presence of older persons residing in Sunnyside. Apart from those residing on their own, the researcher and fieldworkers found the following residential and service centre facilities for the elderly in Sunnyside: Harmonie Hof, Harmonie Oord, Nebohof, Johanna Raath Centre for the Elderly and Karmel Frail Care Centre. Secondly, the obvious lack of literature focusing specifically on the living conditions of elderly/older persons³ residing in present-day Sunnyside emerges as the central research problem. Another motivation for undertaking this investigation is the fact that, according to Schlyter (2005: 264), the

... living conditions of the elderly is not well documented as ageing has remained an under-researched issue in developing countries. Although urban housing has been researched these studies seldom include concerns about the elderly.

1. Research questions

The research questions formulated at the outset of this study are as follows: What are older persons' experiences in relation to their living conditions in Sunnyside? What resilience do older persons demonstrate in relation to their living conditions in Sunnyside?

2. Approach and methodology

In order to investigate the topic under discussion a qualitative research approach was followed. Qualitative research provides opportunities for the interpretation of participants' social worlds by focusing on their experiences and histories (Wheeldon & Faubert 2009: 69). It, enables qualitative researchers to generate "detailed, nuanced, 'grounded' and contextualised understandings of individual experiences" (Funk et al 2010: 594). Creswell (2007: 40) adds that in qualitative research a problem or issue needs to

3 In a search on Unisa's databases on the topic of "the living conditions of the elderly" in South Africa, only one journal article was found, namely "The living conditions of elderly black people in a typical rural area in the Free State" (Van Vuuren & Groenewald 1998).

be explored and the researchers are interested in the marginalised and silenced voices.

The nature of qualitative research affords the researcher the opportunity to obtain subjective, personal data concerning the experiences of older persons residing in present-day Sunnyside, Tshwane, in particular their living conditions and their resilience to the living conditions. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to seek “narratives of meaning”, by moving beyond merely examining the activities but rather investigating those activities in terms of their socio-cultural meanings (Russell & Porter 2003: 365). This approach affords the older persons, as self-knowing subjects, the opportunity to speak authoritatively about their living in present-day Sunnyside and the meaning they derive from it. It also invites them to reflect upon their resilience displayed in the face of their living conditions and, in so doing, foster their personal resilience and celebration of their hardiness (*cf* Jack 2010: 5).

An explorative research design was incorporated as part of the strategy of inquiry as there appeared to be a lack of information on the topic. Neuman (2000: 21) explains that explorative research is normally undertaken when one aims to explore a new topic or an ill-researched issue. The descriptive design was used to provide a detailed description of what was explored (Neuman 2000: 21, Struwig & Stead 2001: 7-8). Struwig & Stead (2001: 8) postulate that contextualising research emphasises both the macro and the micro contexts in which the individual finds him-/herself and how these contexts interact with each other. The contextual research design was incorporated as part of the strategy of inquiry for this research project as the researcher aimed to explore and describe the participants’ experiences in the context of their living in present-day Sunnyside and the resilience demonstrated in the context of their experienced living conditions.

Purposive sampling, as a non-probability sampling technique, was used as the researcher sought information-rich participants because of their knowledge and ability to describe the phenomenon under study (Donalek & Soldwisch 2004: 356). Eight fourth-

level student social workers were recruited and tasked with the responsibility of procuring a sample, and collecting and analysing the data. In view of procuring participants for inclusion in the sample, the fieldworkers approached gatekeepers (directors at non-governmental organisations rendering services to the aged, social workers in the employ of these and other NGOs in the area, managers of old age homes in the area, a ward councillor, and fellow student social workers) to contact participants who met the inclusion criteria. Some of the participants in the study referred the fieldworkers to other potential participants who, after being informed by the fieldworkers about the study willingly participated in the study. This activity relates to “snowball sampling”. This sampling technique is often used when the researcher finds it difficult to locate participants for inclusion into the sample. The starting point with this technique is to contact one or more persons who belong to the population which the researcher would like to include in the sample. The researcher requests their participation and if they agree, s/he will interview them and request them to recruit future subjects for possible inclusion into the sample (Maree 2007: 177). As the sample increases, sufficient data is gathered for research. Customary to qualitative research, no sample size was determined at the outset of the study but the principle of “saturation of data” determined the sample size. The fieldworkers collected data from multiple participants until the themes emerging from the data became fully developed and repetitive (Fossey *et al* 2002: 72, Donalek & Soldwisch 2004: 356). Once 35 in-depth interviews were conducted and the audio-recordings were transcribed, the researcher read through the transcriptions and engaged in a discussion with the fieldworkers. It was concluded that the data had reached a point of saturation and that the process of data collection could be concluded. Only participants who met the following criteria were included in the study: older persons over sixty years of age from different cultural backgrounds;⁴ persons

4 While the Older Persons Act (Act No 13 of 2006) defines older persons as “males over the age of 65 and females over the age of 60” the researcher

who reside in and outside residential facilities for the elderly within the municipal boundaries of Sunnyside, and persons who are available and willing to participate in the study, in that they are fully aware of what the study entails, and participate of their own free will.

Focus groups and in-depth interviews are among the most utilised methods for collecting data in qualitative studies (Milena *et al* 2008: 1279):

The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic. During in-depth interviews, the person being interviewed is considered the expert and the interviewer is considered the student.

In-depth interviews afford participants the opportunity to share personal feelings and opinions and talk about their experiences. This allows the researcher to gain insight into how people interpret and order their world (Milena *et al* 2008: 1279). The in-depth interviews conducted by the fieldworkers were structured according to questions specifically formulated for the purpose of obtaining biographical data about the participants and according to a limited number of questions pertaining to the topic under investigation. These were contained in an interview guide⁵. The questions formulated in view of the research topic specifically focused on the participants' motivations for moving to Sunnyside initially and remaining in Sunnyside; their accounts and experiences of the changes in Sunnyside as a suburb over the years; their experienced living conditions and challenges related to this; the resilience demonstrated in terms of their experienced living conditions, changes and challenges, and suggestions on how the older persons in Sunnyside can be supported.

adopted the World Health Organisation's definition to specify the age range for the inclusion of participants in this study. According to this definition, "elderly" includes all persons over the age of 60 (Wtto 2009).

- 5 Holloway & Wheeler (1996: 55) and Kvale (1996: 174) explain that semi-structured questions contained in an interview guide (not a schedule or questionnaire, as in quantitative research) with the focus on themes or issues to be covered are used in in-depth or focused interviews.

With the consent of the participants, all the interviews were audio-taped. On completion of the data-collection process, the fieldworkers transcribed the audio recordings *verbatim*. Creswell (1994: 153) contends that the researcher is engaged in several activities during qualitative data analysis, including collecting the data, transcribing the interviews, sorting the data into categories, formatting the data into a coherent story or picture, and writing the qualitative text. The fieldworkers and the researcher used Tesch's eight steps (Creswell 2009: 186) to analyse the data systematically, by segmenting it into words or categories that subsequently formed the basis of the emerging story or picture.

For the purpose of data verification, the researcher used Guba's model of trustworthiness as explained in a user-friendly kind of way (Krefting 1991: 215-22), which identifies the following four criteria and strategies for ensuring and establishing trustworthiness, and which is used to assess the qualitative research process undertaken:

- The first criterion addressed in establishing trustworthiness is that of truth value, that is, determining to what extent the findings are a true reflection of the "life-worlds" of the participants, as experienced and described by them. The strategy for establishing truth value is credibility. The actions taken to achieve credibility include triangulation (that is, triangulation of data sources, and the triangulation of different investigators involved in this research project); peer examination (regular discussion and consultations between the fieldworkers and the researcher and other colleagues in the Dept of Social Work); the interviewing techniques used by the fieldworkers, and the researcher overseeing the fieldwork process.
- The second criterion is applicability, or the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts or settings and groups (that is, generalisability). Transferability is used to attain applicability. Mary Rodwell (1998) writes from the perspective of a con-structivist qualitative social work researcher (Ungar 2003: 95):

If the findings transfer, it is the responsibility of the reader of the inquiry report to make that determination, since it is only the reader, not the inquirer, who can be familiar with the time and context in which transfer of the findings might be possible.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) advise that the researcher is responsible for providing a “thick description” to enable an interested party to conclude whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (*cf* Ungar 2003: 95). For this reason “dense” descriptions of the research methodology and findings were provided.

- The third criterion of Guba’s model (1981) is consistency, and refers to the extent to which the replication of the study in a similar context or with similar informants will produce the same results (*cf* Krefting 1991: 215-22). Dependability was used to ensure consistency. The actions taken to ensure dependability in this study included peer examination of the research methodology and implementation; triangulation of data sources and investigators; a dense description of the research methodology, and independent coding (the fieldworkers analysed each other’s transcriptions independently and the researcher independently analysed the entire data set, and the implementation of a code-recode procedure) (Krefting 1991: 216-7).
- The fourth criterion is neutrality, and refers to the extent to which the study’s findings are free from bias. Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose that neutrality in qualitative research should consider the neutrality of the data, rather than that of the researcher, and thus suggested confirmability as the strategy to achieve neutrality (*cf* Krefting 1991: 217). In this study, triangulation was used to achieve confirmability (Krefting 1991: 221-2).

3. Discussion

The research findings resulted from the analysis of the 35 in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of older persons residing

in Sunnyside, and a consensus discussion on the analysed data between the researcher and the fieldworkers.

The discussion on the research findings are presented in two sections, namely the biographical profile of the participants, and a discussion of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the process of data analysis and the consensus discussion. Each of these will be supported by narratives from the transcribed interviews, and complemented by a literature control.

3.1 The biographical profile of the participants

The sample consisted of 13 males and 22 females. The male participants' ages ranged from 60 to 82, while the female participants' ages ranged from 62 to 82. According to Newman & Newman (2006: 468), the participants matched the life stages of "later adulthood" and "very old age", as the period of life between the ages of 60 and 75 is termed "later adulthood" and the period of life from 75 onwards is referred to as "very old age". Twenty-nine participants indicated their race as "white", while six participants indicated their race as "black". All participants but one indicated their country of origin as South Africa. Prior to retirement the participants were engaged in various occupations, namely bookkeeping and accounting, administration, human resources, teaching, the ministry, nursing and housekeeping. Some of the retired participants are still employed full-time. Their sources of income in retirement range from private pensions and investments to state old-age pensions (grants) and financial support from family members to earning some income from their current part- or full-time employment. Eighteen participants mentioned that they were still enjoying "good" health; eight referred to their health status as being "fair" and nine labelled it as being "poor"; they were among others suffering from ailments such as high blood pressure, heart, back, hip and ankle problems and arthritis. One participant indicated that he is "homeless" and four mentioned that they are staying with relatives; all the other participants still live independently in owned/rented flats or rooms, some in and others outside retirement villages and centres

in Sunnyside. Thirteen participants still use their own transport. The remainder use public transport, transport offered by friends, relatives and retirement centres, and walk.

3.2 Themes, sub-themes and categories

The participants' responses provided the following themes and sub-themes.

3.2.1 Length of stay, motivation for moving to and remaining in Sunnyside

The participants' length of stay in Sunnyside ranged from five to 45 years. A number of participants mentioned the motivation for relocating to Sunnyside: employment opportunities in and around Sunnyside and the fact that Sunnyside was conveniently located on major bus routes. Others originally moved to Sunnyside to be closer to elderly and ailing parents and/or children and grandchildren. A few participants mentioned changes in marital status (divorce, a husband who went missing, and the death of a marital partner) as their primary reason for relocating to Sunnyside. A few participants also mentioned that one's independence was the reason for moving to Sunnyside. Affordable property and rent prices served as motivation for some to move to Sunnyside post-retirement and to live independently from their children. Three of the six black participants interviewed relocated to Sunnyside to live with their children and grandchildren, while one of the black participants relocated to Sunnyside when her employers left the apartment to her upon emigrating to Britain. One participant resided in Sunnyside as a student at the University of Pretoria and so enjoyed this experience that he decided to relocate to Sunnyside upon retirement. With reference to their continued stay in Sunnyside the participants provided the following motivations: financial constraints (they do not have the financial means to move to another area and the cost of living in Sunnyside is relatively "reasonable"); independence (they value their independence and privacy, (*cf* Birkeland & Natvig 2009: 257); they are happy with their place of residence; all the amenities, shops and services they

need are in close proximity; the area is familiar to them (*cf* Föbker & Grotz 2006: 101-2), and they are among their peers.

3.2.2 Participants' perceptions and experiences of the changes that took place in Sunnyside over the years

The participants' length of stay in Sunnyside qualified them to speak authentically about the changes they have witnessed and experienced in Sunnyside over the years. Their accounts portrayed the Sunnyside of yesteryear and present-day Sunnyside and the changes that took place.

The following accounts provide a glimpse of the Sunnyside then and now and of the environmental and architectural changes:

If I remember this park [...] this section of the flats [referring to the corner of Esselen and Cilliers Streets] was built in [...] the war times [...] this was all mealie [...] plantation this was the only building and around this side [Cilliers Street down towards Muckleneuk and town side] there were no other buildings [...] South African Bureau of Standards was there across the road [Esselen Street] [...] There where Sunny Park is, my father's sister and her husband they had a boarding house [...] there were quite a few old houses dotted here and there and if there was a block of flats, they'd be small flats you know like two stories high [...] Another very old section is [...] Gerhardt Moerdyk Street [...] it's at the bottom just before the Apies river, just before Nelson Mandela Drive [...] Those were the original houses.

Yes, you see in the old days there used to be a lot of private hotels when I came here [...] [Presently] [...] the private hotels are all running out of business [...] There were no new flats yet. These flats have been here for the last thirty/forty years.

Baie [het] verander [...] Daar was [...] omtrent [...] 13 apteke, hier in Esselenstraat [...] En van die tattoos uitgekom het was dit nou weer net tattoo shops. Die apteke het almal toegemaak, of meeste van hulle [...] Na die tattoos het ek dink die haarkappers oopgemaak, daar is nogal baie haarkappers hier. En die selfone [...] en hier was hierdie sharks, money loaners.⁶

6 Lots have changed [...] There were [...] about [...] 13 pharmacies here in Esselen Street [...] and since the tattoos appeared then it was only tattoo shops. The pharmacies closed, or most of them [...] After the tattoo shops,

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Improvements, lots of improvements. [...] I mean Sunny Park, was upgraded. And I see now they are busy upgrading Ned Park which is opposite Sunny Park [...] OK Bazaar changed to Shoprite [...] So we've seen changes. We've seen houses being converted into blocks of flats.

While one participant mentioned: "You know Sunnyside was a posh suburb [...]", the following utterances convey some participants' views on the present-day Sunnyside:

There's an element of urban decay [...] Sunnyside is dirty and beginning to feel and look like a slum.

It was a lovely suburb but unfortunately I think it's probably a step or what lower than Hillbrow in Joburg presently.

Now [referring to present-day Sunnyside] it is too noisy [...] a filthy place, and the crime [...] Every building is degraded, running down. The owners do not pay the levies and the other owners cannot do what they want to do like painting the building.

With reference to Sunnyside' demographics, social life, level of crime and safety then and now, the participants articulated their observations and experiences as follows:

I'm talking about those years. There were mostly white people staying here. Now [...] if you look around, predominantly they have left [...]

... there were a lot of elderly people staying in this area it was, it was really quiet. It was like an old age home [...]

When I arrived here eight years ago it wasn't as dense as it is now – it gets denser by the day.

Sunnyside has become black [...] there's very few whites living in here now.

... there's a lot [...] of foreigners [...]

if my memory serves me right, hairdressers opened shops. There are rather a lot of hairdressers here. And the cell phones ... and you found these sharks, money loaners here.

... we started having problems [...] 'donker voete' (referring to the Black people) [...] when they started moving in, the other people moving out [...] it's gone very dark [...] It's not Sunnyside anymore – it's Sonskyn Kant, daar waar die son nie meer skyn nie [...] our little white ship [referring to the retirement village] on the mighty ocean [...]

With reference to the social life in Sunnyside then and now the participants shared the following:

We [referring to fellow residents and the participant herself] were a happy family.

... I tell you ten years ago this place [referring to the block of flats] was like a party [...] everybody used to mix. We used to go down to the [communal] braai area [...] old people [and] the younger ones [...] and braai [...] it was lovely [...] then of course times changed now people don't want to mix [...] we don't even braai anymore. Only the younger black people students [...] go braai there and then they drink and make a noise and then I've got to stop it [...] the braais have actually become a white elephant [...]

Say for the first three years [after the 1994-elections] we still used to go down [to Sunnypark Shopping Centre]. The blacks, the whites, we'd all enjoy ourselves [...] Until recently [...] It becomes a drunken brawl now. You don't go down. It's taboo [...]

I remember Sunnyside as a student, we came here for flicks and restaurants, it was the place

It's [referring to the social facilities, restaurants and movie houses] completely changed.

It's [referring to Sunnyside's vibrancy and being a status place to stay] gone down the drain altogether.

The following accounts elaborate on Sunnyside then and now in terms of the levels of crime and safety:

... a couple of years ago we used to go and eat at Village Steak every Friday night it's nine ten o'clock at night [...] [It was] safe. We used to walk home, do window shopping but times have completely changed hey you cannot go out at night anymore [...] we haven't been out at night for what maybe ten years [...] fifteen years.

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[Previously] from six o' clock, the people could walk down there and walk long. Now you can't do it [...]

... we did not have criminals by then [...]

[Daar is] misdaad hier en motorkapings. [Daar is] leegleërs, hulle soek werk of 'n geleëntheid om kwaad te doen.⁷

... you can't afford really to walk around on your own [...] from ten, ten thirty, eleven 'o clock [in the morning] it's very dark on these streets. The elderly people who live in these flats will be walking two or three together. While I am on these premises I feel safe, I feel safe outside [in the morning], I don't like going out later. We are not safe, even coming in by car, we're not safe anymore.

The participants also referred to Sunnyside's infrastructure then and now with specific reference to the shops and economic activities as follows:

Sunnyside was destyds die deftigste inkopiesentrum van Pretoria. Ons het in Gezina [one of the other suburbs of Pretoria] gebly maar hier kom inkopies doen [...].⁸

Daai jare, was hier baie lekker winkels [...] lieflike klerewinkels. Dit was 'n baie deftige deel van Pretoria, almal het hierna toe gekom as hulle iets besonder wil koop.⁹

Shops have changed; we don't have any more dress shops here and boutiques in this area. No haberdashery shops here, no shoe shop, no lingerie. Now you know, now you get mostly hair dressing, internet cafés and even in residential areas which is illegal. We've got here in this very street a supermarket, a hair dressing salon and an internet café in between houses here [...]

... your shops, its client based [catering mainly for the black clientele] so I go and look for items and I can't find them here.

- 7 [You find] crime and motor hijackings here. [You find] loiterers, they are looking for work or an opportunity to do something illegal.
- 8 In those days Sunnyside was the posh area in Pretoria to do shopping. We stayed in Gezina [one of the other suburbs of Pretoria] but came here to do our shopping [...]
- 9 Those years there were lots of shops [...] lovely clothing stores. This was a very posh part of Pretoria. Everybody came here they wanted to buy something special.

When wishing to purchase magazines or journals a participant said: “There’s no CNA or bookshops [...] in Esselen Street. It’s just hair salons, fast food [outlets], furniture shops [...] the shops also come and go, there’s a big turnover of shops in Esselen Street”. In his attempt to highlight a positive change he said: “Sunnypark is revamped, it’s very nice but once again its client based”.

3.2.3 Participants’ accounts of their experiences of living conditions in Sunnyside

Four of the six black participants interviewed are living with relatives in Sunnyside. This trend is confirmed by Burns, Keswell and Leibbrandt (2005: 109) who noted that multi-generational households are common amongst South African families. Except for one of the black older persons who informed the fieldworker that “I stay with my daughter, three grandsons and a granddaughter in a two-bedroom flat, as you can imagine it gets a bit crowded”, the remainder of the black elderly reported being satisfied with living with their relatives.

The remainder of the participants live independently in Sunnyside, either in flats or rooms in or outside retirement villages. With the exception of two of these participants, they were satisfied with their respective places of residence, a trend confirmed in the literature. Föbker & Grotz (2006) who investigated the living conditions that best meet the needs of elderly people in different urban cities found “that elderly people show a deeper satisfaction of their living environment [...] than younger people do”. The following accounts confirm this:

It might be a bit pokey, but it’s mine. It makes a big difference [...] Yes, it’s a rather nice complex. The gardens are nice, and the buildings are clean, and the food’s not bad. [This participant enjoys the “living in rights” of a one-bedroomed flat in an apartment block in a retirement village.]

Of course it’s [referring to a room in an old age home] not so wonderful to arrive in a room only [...] No, they haven’t got it [referring to en-suite bathrooms], in here you share. But luckily, we’re four gentlemen on our floor. Very neat, very well. You don’t have to worry about [...] Two baths and two showers. I always say it’s wonderful, there’s nothing wrong with this place.

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Ek bly in die Penthouse. Dit is baie lekker. Ek voel veilig met die sekuriteitswag en ek het regtig nie 'n probleem om hier te bly nie.¹⁰

It's just this room [...] I love this place. I've got everything here. Television, telephone, kitchenette, bathroom, shower [...] alles is hierso. [It's a] nice place in winter and the summer [...] I've been happy here since the first day [...]

Two participants were not satisfied with their living conditions: "I wouldn't say it is pleasant. But for me it's a way of life, I mean for me at my age I just feel I don't want to go and stay with my children". (This participant is a widow living in a two-bedroomed flat east of Sunnyside).

The only homeless participant interviewed shared the following experiences concerning his living conditions in Sunnyside, in particular with reference to where he sleeps:

Net waar ek kan kry bietjie shelter. Net da by die nag, by die oggend ek moet net opstaan. Eish. Ek het baie kere kos gekry en die shop by Shoprite hulle het kos gegee. Maar nou hy's bietjie short [...] [When enquiring about where he does his washing, he stated:] Ja, ek probeer om te die wasgoed daar by die rivier maar hulle het nie reg die water daarso nie [...] Lekker vuil water daarso [...] Vir een dag by die week dan kry ek daardie honderd rand dan shop ek alles [...] Hy's min as ek daai honderd rand gekry het daardie hele week ek kry nie die job nie. As ek daarso gaan ek betaal nog [...] As ek moet was ek moet net by die rivier gaan of andertyd ek gaan by die shopping centre by die toilet dan dis bietjie beter [...].¹¹

- 10 I stay in the Penthouse. It is very nice. I feel safe with the security guard here and I really do not have a problem to stay here.
- 11 Everywhere I can, I get a bit of shelter. I stay there at night but need to get up and go in the morning. Most of the time I got food from Shoprite, they gave me food. But now the food is rather scarce. [When enquiring about where he does his washing, he stated:] I tried to do my washing at the river, but the water is not right ...it is dirty [...] Once a week I earn one hundred rand and then I buy everything I need [...] That hundred rand is not much and especially if I don't get another job for that week [...] If I need to wash myself I need to go to the river. Sometimes I go to the toilets at shopping centre – it's a bit better [...]

On how it is to be homeless, he remarked: “Ja, as dit donker is jy weet nie waar gaan jy bly nie.”¹²

While the majority of the participants were positive about their immediate living arrangements (places of residence), they highlighted a number of advantages, disadvantages and challenges experienced specifically in living in Sunnyside.

3.2.4 The advantages of living in Sunnyside

The majority of the participants mentioned the proximity to shops and amenities, the availability of public transport, the visibility of the police and how the elderly are treated by their fellow residents as the advantages related to living in Sunnyside. The following accounts confirm this:

Okay so the positive, the positive is we are near all the shops, hospitals, cinemas, church, chemist and the art gallery here [...]

This is a pretty suburb [...] Sunnyside is sunnier and warmer.

The bus service, there's a bus service here. You're near to town [...] Many areas to walk to, from here without feeling threatened during the day [...] Police are very visible. Levies are cheaper, the security guards, the police, the students and people in general are very friendly. So those are all my positives [...]

“[Die] polisie is baie sigbaar” and the taxi drivers at their residence were very trustworthy, “mens kan regtig op hulle staatmaak.”¹³

A participant spoke of the respect the staff, where he worked, showed him: “Part of the black culture is respect for your elders, so none of the staff call me by name they always call me ‘Mr or Meneer’”.

Die swartes het baie respek vir ons. Hulle het vir ons gesê hulle sal nie oumense beroof nie want oumense is arm [...] Sunnyside is eintlik 'n heerlike gemeenskap. Die swartes het ons aanvaar, ons is 'n klein wit eiland in hierdie [...] cosmopolitan gemeenskap.¹⁴

12 When it's dark you don't know where you are going to stay.

13 [The] police are very visible ..., one can really rely on them.

14 The Blacks have lots of respect for us. They told us that they will not rob

Another benefit of living in Sunnyside is that the cost of living is cheaper: “[Dit is] goedkoper verblyf as in ander voorstede”.¹⁵ “Economically it suits me to live here”.

3.2.5 The disadvantages of living in Sunnyside

The participants articulated some of the disadvantages related to living in Sunnyside as challenges. One of the disadvantages mentioned was the littering and rubbish visible in Sunnyside:

... en sypaadjies is absoluut bemors. Weet, hulle gooi net die goed neer, daar’s nie sinlikheid dat hulle dink ek moet die plek darem skoon hou nie;¹⁶ The trash is piled up, like a week’s trash is piled up.

Overcrowding was identified as another disadvantage:

And of course overcrowding and then there is no recreation facility here for people, for students, for us, I mean I’ll have to travel [...].

... it gets denser by the day.

... because of the change of government and all that sort of jazz, the whites pulling out, moving out and letting their flats to anybody that will pay. Of course two people sign up for the flat and ten move in. As soon as the strangers came (they were renting the flats to) the noise began [...] drinking, shouting, leaving the gates open. The Title Deed Act says, [at most] ‘two adults and two children’ [...] they were pushing in eight, nine, 10 people at a time and charging them rental [...].

This correlates with the experiences of undergraduate students in Alpaslan’s (2010: 151) study, who reported overcrowding as an experienced reality in Sunnyside. Contrary to the participants in Alpaslan’s study, participants in this study did not personally

us because old people are poor [...] In actual fact Sunnyside is a lovely community. The Blacks have accepted us. We are this little white island in this [...] cosmopolitan community.

15 The cost of living is cheaper than in other suburbs.

16 [...] the pavements are covered with litter. Everybody just throws down rubbish, there is no cleanliness or any thought that I should at least keep the place clean.

experience living in overcrowded flats or shared rooms, but were aware that some flats exceeded the stipulated number of tenants.

Another disadvantage was the fact that shops do not cater for the older folk:

... your shops, it's client based [suggesting mainly products catering for black clientele are available for purchase] so I go and look for items and I can't find them here [...] [when looking for certain magazines or journals he said]: there's no CNA or bookshops [...] in Esselen Street [...]

Whilst some participants indicated the respect for the elderly in Sunnyside as one of the benefits of living in this suburb, a few participants referred to the lack of respect for older persons as follows:

If you're moving about on foot it's a very different culture, they [black pedestrians] don't [give way] they just keep walking, you've got to give way.

We are being insulted and sworn at for just walking on the street.

Ek was byvoorbeeld voorgekeer in die straat. En hulle het my geforseer van die sypaadjie af, daar was vyf swart jong vroumense wat dit gedoen het [...] Een swart ou ook wat my sommer net omgestamp het, het vir my gesê toe, 'die sypaadjie is nie vir wit mense nie' [...].¹⁷

Participants also mentioned noise as a disadvantage and challenge experienced. The following accounts confirm this:

... they're making a hell of a noise they spin their tyres; you can hear it from here [...] it got totally out of hand [referring to the noise in general and drinking].

Then we find the cars parked out here on the pavement and then they have their radios on with loud music [...] 'ba-ba-ba-ba'; you know all the loud noise from the car.

17 I was stopped in the street. Five young black women forced me off the pavement [...] One black lady knocked me over and said to me, 'the pavement is not for white people'.

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What has changed is the noise level [...] especially with the vuvuzelas coming out in this day your noise levels in Sunnyside is quite [...] noisy ...

Ai die mense hulle slaap nie, die hele nag hulle is op en af.¹⁸

Referring to the realities related to the living conditions of Unisa's undergraduate students residing in Sunnyside, the participants in Alpaslan's (2010: 154) study also referred to the noise in Sunnyside as a challenge.

A number of participants mentioned that the noise made by some of the residents is fuelled by substance abuse, and the latter along with the drinking establishments in Sunnyside can also be viewed as a challenge, as the following accounts testify:

... noise [...] the drinking [...] they act if the whole of Sunnyside belongs to them [...]; I don't know where they get their drinks from.

They scream, shout, you know [...]; [...] much more shebeens, what do you call it? Drinking places here and noises.

The majority of the participants mentioned the challenges experienced in relation to the uneven pavements, motorists not obeying the rules of the road, experiencing difficulty in crossing the street and to get onto the public transport. A few accounts affirm this:

... you've got to watch crossing the road at traffic lights because they'll [referring to the motorists] drive right through you [...] the pavements are uneven and there's big holes in the pavement. If you're moving about on foot [...] they [referring to black pedestrians] don't [give way] they just keep walking, you've got to give way.

... [dit is] nie meer maklik om op die sypaadjies te loop [...] wat [dit] vir bejaardes moeilik maak is die beweging op die sypaadjies omdat die strate so vol is. Bestuurders van voertuie is baie onverskillig. Daar is geen verkeersreëls nie. Dit is baie gevaarlik om 'n straat te kruis [...].¹⁹

18 Ay, these people, they don't sleep. They are moving up and down the whole night.

19 [It is] not easy to walk on the pavements anymore [...] what complicates it

[One] can't get on the bus anymore [...] it's too high.

Die grootste uitdagings wat ek het is die sypaadjies [...] Dis ongelyk en dit word begroei met gras en daar word allerhande gemors gegooi [...] Om oor 'n pad te kom by 'n robot, daai liggie is te vinnig. Veral vir 'n ou mens.²⁰

In respect of the challenges articulated by the participants, Föbker & Grotz (2006: 101) and Abbot *et al* (2009: 193) state that for the younger and physically able cohort of the population, uneven pavements might be a trivial issue, but not for the elderly and that in order to create an environment conducive to growing old successfully responsible parties must repair uneven surfaces, cracks or obstructions on the pavements.

The majority of the participants articulated crime and lack of safety as disadvantages and challenges experienced. They not only view Sunnyside to be crime ridden and unsafe, but also shared experiences where they were victims of crime and witnessed or heard of other older persons being victims of crime. The following accounts testify to this:

There's definitely a lot of crime, the young people are killing each other.

Crime [...] the main problem.

People are killed almost every week end, or mugged.

I'm very careful because I have been robbed in Esselen Street. He [the criminal] held me tight and then I fought myself loose [and] found someone had robbed me.

Net die tsotsies [...] hy's bietjie gevaarlik, by die nag hy is bietjie baie gevaarlik. By die dag hy is bietjie beter, weer die police hulle ry op en af [...] Hulle kom van die tavern af, nou

for the older people is the movement on the pavement and the fact that the streets are so full. Motorists are reckless. Traffic rules don't exist.. It is very dangerous to cross a street [...]

- 20 My biggest challenge is the pavements [...] they are uneven, covered with grass and litter [...] The traffic light doesn't give an old person enough time to cross the road.

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hulle skop jou as jy slaap. Of hulle miskien, jy het die pak klere, hulle trek daai pak, hulle hol weg. Jy kan hom nie hardloop.²¹

We [referring to the older folk] are always a soft target for being mugged, for being robbed [...] you always have a fear when you walk down Mears Street to do your shopping in Sunny Park [...] the fear of being mugged, being robbed, which often happened before [...] as with myself.

Du Plessis (2006: 4), reporter for the *Pretoria News*, echoed the participants' references to crime when residents mentioned that crime in Sunnyside is a daily occurrence and that Sunnyside is a dangerous place. Many residents mentioned that they had to lock their doors at night and remarked that one could get shot for a phone, a car or household goods. Esselen Street was referred to as the "hell" because the many clubs are conducive to alcohol abuse and muggings (Du Plessis 2006: 4).

Street children, vagrants and beggars as a hindrance. Of the three participants who mentioned the presence of street children in Sunnyside (*cf* Schenck 2008: 5) only one implicated them as being a hindrance: "... street children and vagrants [...] they cost you [begging]".

3.2.6 Resilience demonstrated by the elders

The participants' resilience in response to the changes and challenges experienced relating to living in present-day Sunnyside must be viewed against their mindset and their approach to life as articulated in the following accounts:

Because you make your life [...] in [...] your mind [...] you make it a heaven or you make a heaven out of hell or you make a hell out of heaven.

Nee, dit hang baie van 'n mens self af of jy bietjie wil wyer kyk na dinge en besef wat aangaan [...] Ja, arme Sunnyside, het niks daarmee [referring to be unhappy] uit te waai nie [...] Ek

- 21 Just the tsotsies [...] they [referring to Sunnyside] are dangerous. At night it is very dangerous. During the day it is better as the police are driving up and down [...] At night when they return from the tavern they kick you when you're sleeping. Or if you have a suit, they will take that suit and run away and you cannot run.

het nog altyd baie lekker gebly. Baie ander mense bly ook nog baie lekker hierse [...] Ek dink dit hang baie af van 'n mens se houding.²²

The participants' length of stay in Sunnyside; the changes they have witnessed and experienced while living in this suburb; the related challenges resulting from these changes and how they respond to the latter (for instance, the resilience demonstrated) match Windle *et al's* (2008: 285) description of the concept "resilience" as being "able to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change". The following accounts testify how the participants adjusted to the changes and challenges in their living environment and how resilient they are by "flourishing despite adversity" (Hildon *et al* 2008: 728).

In responding to the demographic and infrastructural changes in Sunnyside, some of the participants demonstrated resilience which for older people "has been described [as] flexibility and a type of adaptive capacity" (Staudinger *et al* 2005: 355). The following participant's response confirms the literature: "Party van ons pas maklik daarby aan want dit [referring to the changes in Sunnyside] het geleidelik gekom".²³

Two participants mention a precondition for coping with and living alongside other race groups is: "Yes we've had to change! We had to change, that is for sure" and "You've got to learn their culture, which is totally different to ours". Another participant gave some advice on how to live alongside people from different racial back-grounds, and this testifies to her flexibility and adaptability: "Ek [is] [...] met almal vriendelik, as ons in 'n ry staan dan groet ek vriendelik en vra die mense na hul welstand. Ek kry net liefde terug. Hierdie is my stukkie paradys op

22 No, it depends on the person if he wants to take a wider look at things and realises what is going on [...] Poor Sunnyside has nothing to do with it [referring to be unhappy] [...] I have always lived here comfortably. Many other people are also living here comfortably [...] I think it depends largely on one's attitude.

23 Some of us have adapted easily to it [referring to the changes in Sunnyside] as it came gradually.

aarde.”²⁴ The following quotations testify to the benefits some of the participants experience by embracing their neighbours from different cultural groups and indicate how they have become protective factors in their lives:

Algerians living there [across from the participant] [...] a husband and wife and three little boys. Very nice people. But they can bring me food [...] they bring me food for weeks. I said to her, ‘Gina stop it [...]’.

Nee dit is net uitlanders [referring to the neighbours] [...] Maar verskriklike vriendelike mense. Hulle is altyd besorgd oor ons. As ons weggaan vra ons hulle moet kyk dat alles OK is. As hulle weggaan vra hulle ons weer om te kyk of hulle plek OK is [...] Regtig dis so wonderlik. Dit kan ek nie eintlik van die blankes sê [nie], het dit nooit gedoen nie.²⁵

In order to cope with the shops catering for a different clientele, one participant shared her strategy (and adaptability): “Ek het gou leer aanpas. Die mooi winkels is weg maar hier is nog alles wat ek nodig het, alles is binne bereik.”²⁶

While crime is rife in Sunnyside (*cf* Du Plessis 2006: 4) and some participants were victims of crimes or witness to and heard of crimes being perpetrated against other elders and fellow citizens of Sunny-side, the participants have become “street-wise” and shared what they do in order not to become victims of crime and to remain hardy.²⁷

- 24 I am friendly with everybody. If we are in a queue, I greet in a friendly way and ask the people about their well-being. I just receive love in return. This is my piece of paradise on earth.
- 25 No it's just foreigners [...] but very friendly people. They are always so concerned about us. If we go away we ask them to see to it that everything is OK. If they go away they ask us to look after their place and see to it that their place is OK [...] Really it is wonderful. This is something that I cannot say of the whites, they have never done it.
- 26 I have learned to adjust quickly. The beautiful shops are gone but everything I need is within reach.
- 27 According to Vance *et al* (2008: 263-4), “hardy people are those who remain committed to their lives and feel intricately involved in their lives and exert such authority over their own circumstances and experiences. They perceive the changes and problems in their lives as challenges and opportunities for

I'm very careful when I walk now. I don't take my cell phone with me; I don't take my watch with me. I don't take anything of value and then you're sort of alert the whole time. If I go draw money, I'm very careful to come straight home, I don't deviate at all. I never go anywhere with a hell of a lot of money.

Ek ry glad nie laatmiddag of in die aand rond nie. Mens het geleer voor dit donker is jy in die huis, jy soek nie moeilikheid nie.²⁸

I don't wear jewellery when I go walking and I have a police whistle in here [under her shirt] for in case, but nothing ever happened.

... If I'm invited out for a braaivleis or to go out and eat some place in die aand dan sê ek: 'Baie dankie, I'll come, I'd love to come but you will have to come and fetch me'.

Hierdie ou vrou gaan nie stil staan nie. Ek het 'n 2 liter Coca-Cola gaan koop by die kafee, en een van hulle [referring to a youngster] het net aangehou terug kom en voor my ingespring. Toe slaan ek haar met die bottel Coca-Cola.²⁹

... I never use jewellery and I never take a hand bag. Anything I take, I put on pants with [...] pockets and put my card in there [...] I buy on a Pretorium Trust card [...] I don't have any money. I put twenty rand in for in case if I see something there [...] hawker there and I want to buy but otherwise I don't take it nowadays. If I get into my car I lock my doors immediately. If I have to go out and come back sort of dusk or just after dark I have a look who's around [...] and I don't get out of my car unless the security gate is closed see it closes automatically so I remain in my car and I watch in my mirror whether anybody is coming.

The participants also shared some innovative coping strategies to deal with the noise:

further growth and development.”

- 28 I don't drive around late afternoons and in the evening. One has learned to be at home before dark. You don't look for trouble.
- 29 This old lady is not going to stand still. I bought a 2 litre Coca-Cola at the café and one of them [referring to a youngster] continued to jump in, in front of me. I then hit her with the Coca-Cola bottle.

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... as dit nou die nag wild gaan [referring to the noise getting too much] het ek prestik gekry en in my ore sit. Ag, die vuvuzelas pla 'n bietjie maar gelukkig dra baie van ons gehoorapparate, dan sit ons dit af en dan weet ons niks van die geraas nie.³⁰

In order to deal with the overcrowding in the flats and the unruliness of neighbours, the participants' resilience and coping resources are illustrated in the following accounts:

... there was a lot of students in the flat here. There's only supposed to be three students and they ended up seven in the flat. I went there they wanted to attack me so I came back and I called the police and the police cleared them out, chop-chop and in the same month they sommer moved out of here.

... so I've I had the police here quite a few times and said just chuck them out [...] [referring to tenants being drunk and making a noise] [...] I would never forget about the [...] bloke [Police man] that came along he was a six foot six toughie ... boy and did he handle them [...] We got rid of them [...] I think they realised at the end that's not the place to stay for me when I drink.

Apart from the resilience demonstrated in view of the changes and challenges experienced by the older persons in relation to living in Sunnyside, the participants also employ various coping strategies and resources in adjusting to ageing: staying active and healthy to prevent disease and disability; maintaining the perception of self as “not being old”; still being actively engaged in full-time or part-time employment; engaging in volunteer work, recreation and hobbies; actively engaging in religious and spiritual activities, and maintaining contact and meaningful relationships with family and friends. These coping resources correspond with the literature that focuses on the topics of “living long and keeping well” (Bassett *et al* 2007) and the “competencies required for successful aging” (Vance *et al* 2008: 262).

30 [...] at night when it goes wild [...] I took Prestik [...] and put it in my ears.

The vuvuzelas are a bit of a bother. Luckily most of us wear hearing-aids. So we switch them off and then we don't know anything about the noise.

4. Conclusion and the participants' recommendations

Based on the narratives of the older persons who participated in this research project and the meanings they attach to their experienced living conditions in Sunnyside, and in response to the question: "Sunny side and/or shady side?", it is concluded that for the participants in this research project, Sunnyside has both a sunny side and a shady side. Their way of looking at and approaching life, and their resilience (for instance, their flexibility, adaptive capacities, coping strategies and resources, and hardiness) showed that they seem to be coping with the shady side of Sunnyside. Contrary to what might have been expected, it is clear that for these residents of Sunnyside, the advantages related to the sunny side of their suburb appear to outweigh the disadvantages of its shady side.

The participants' recommendations for support of the elderly in Sunnyside include the following: "fixing of pavements"; "cleaning the pavements – more cement and less grass-pavements"; "keeping the robots green longer for older pedestrians to cross the road"; "more traffic control – intervene in reckless driving, (spoedhobbels)"; "making transport available"; "provide cheaper transport"; "put an extra step in the bus"; "assist the elderly in buying groceries, banking, paying water and lights"; "subsidising, or providing affordable housing"; "making available someone with a sympathetic ear to talk to"; "more personal visits to the elderly"; "taking the elderly out on trips", and "If [only] there was such a place here in Sunnyside where elderly people could go [Pretoria Council for the Aged]".

Based on the daily experiences and needs of the elderly in Sunnyside, it is trusted and envisaged that the above recommendations will inform the agendas and service plans of social service organisations that render services in Sunnyside to the elderly, in particular, and that it will call them to action.

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