STUDENTS' CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF STUDENT HUNGER

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ABSTRACT

Student hunger and food-related challenges are a pressing issue for higher education institutions in South Africa and has a negative effect on academic success and overall student well-being. While recent studies focusing on student hunger have explored its prevalence and contributing factors quantitatively, little is known about students' own views of the problem experienced by them and more specifically, about the ways in which students define or conceptualise hunger. This article about students' conceptualisations of student hunger can aid institutions of higher education and other role players to plan interventions that are relevant and sustainable.

Photovoice was employed with a group of students from one institution of higher education in South Africa. The students who volunteered to participate were from different study fields. From the collaborative data analysis process, two concepts emerged: hunger of the stomach and hunger of the mind. This finding highlights the complexity of addressing student hunger in ways that are comprehensive and sustainable.

Keywords: students, hunger, food security

INTRODUCTION

Student hunger and food-related challenges are pressing issues for higher education institutions in South Africa (Adeniyi, Nthoiwa, and Mirugi-Mukundi 2018; Dominguez-Whitehead 2017) and have a negative effect on academic success and overall student well-being (Leibowitz et al.

2012, 9). Various programmes have been introduced to assist and support students in an attempt to improve student well-being and success. Choices about which programmes to implement are influenced by the prevailing conceptualisation and understanding of what student hunger is. However, the conceptualisations of students – as the ones experiencing the issue – have not been investigated expansively in South Africa. This article about students' conceptualisations of student hunger enhances our understanding of student hunger by contributing a dimension that has been neglected previously when approaching the issue.

In this article, South African literature on student hunger is reviewed, followed by a description of the dimensions of food security, an overview of the implementation of the photovoice method, and a thematic report of students' conceptualisation.

STUDENT HUNGER IN SOUTH AFRICA

Over the last decade, student hunger and food insecurity in the higher education context have sporadically, yet increasingly, been under the international research spotlight. Studies in food-secure countries like Australia (Hughes et al. 2011; Micevski, Thornton, and Brockington 2014) and the United States of America (USA) (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019; Nazmi et al. 2019; Patton-Lopez et al. 2014) have found that food insecurity among tertiary students not only exists, but is significantly higher than the prevalence in the general populations of the same countries. Australia and the USA have changed higher education policies over the past two centuries to include more students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This has prompted interest in food security among students (Hughes et al. 2011, 27; Patton-Lopez et al. 2014, 211).

Similar to Australia and the USA, since 1994, South Africa has also embarked on the process of restructuring the fragmented systems of Apartheid into an integrated inclusive higher education system (Jansen 2004; Reddy 2004). Whereas increased access for people from low socio-economic backgrounds were achieved to some extent in the first ten years of democracy (De Villiers, Van Wyk, and Van der Berg 2013), challenges with student success and support remain. Apart from academic support, it has been found that students require material support towards challenges with accommodation and food (Dominguez-Whitehead 2015; Machika and Johnson 2015; McGhie 2012; Sekhukhune 2006).

The first studies on hunger in the higher education sector of South Africa (Gwacela 2013; Kassier and Veldman 2013; Munro et al. 2013) established that food insecurity was indeed a reality among students. Subsequently, more studies were conducted at other institutions (Rudolph et al. 2018; Sabi et al. 2020; Steenkamp et al. 2016; Van den Berg and Raubenheimer 2015). Although food insecurity is not yet quantifiable in an exact percentage of the total student

population, all studies concur that there is a problem in South Africa.

The causes of student food insecurity have been examined mainly from a quantitative approach. From the limited information available, evidence shows that the factors that contribute to food insecurity at South African higher education institutions are primarily personal demographics, the source of tuition funding, and students' living arrangements. According to Van den Berg and Raubenheimer (2015), black or coloured males who are first-generation students are most likely to experience food insecurity. This is ascribed to the history of racial and economic inequality in South Africa. Secondly, students who receive financial aid through government programmes, like the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding, come from very poor socio-economic backgrounds and usually do not have the support systems to address funding shortfalls or delays in the release of funding (Breier 2010; Munro et al. 2013; Van den Berg and Raubenheimer 2015). Late pay-out cycles have led to students being unfunded for periods of up to eight months (Carolissen 2018; Machika and Johnson 2015). While the financial aid covers tuition, books, and accommodation, some programmes do not cover the cost of daily living, including food. An additional factor that renders students vulnerable, is their accommodation – how available food is where they stay and what measures they must take to acquire food (Dominguez-Whitehead 2015).

Investigations into the types of food that students self-reportedly eat have found that students eat food of low nutritional quality (Kassier and Veldman 2013; Munro et al. 2013; Steenkamp et al. 2016). While this could be attributed to a lack of knowledge about nutrition (Ndlovu 2017), the issue is exacerbated by limited access to healthy food at university campuses (Meko and Jordaan 2016).

Recommendations made from the South African studies include increasing funds provided by financial aid, making money available to buy food, making food available, and empowering students with knowledge and skills to buy and prepare nutritious food (Munro et al. 2013; Ndlovu 2017; Sabi et al. 2015; Steenkamp et al. 2016; Van den Berg and Raubenheimer 2015). An alternative call for more qualitative explorations of people's perceptions of food and hunger have also been put forth, acknowledging that the issue is more complex than providing food to people (Dominguez-Whitehead 2015; Ntloko 2018).

While the term *food insecurity* is used more commonly in attempts to measure, quantify and compare intake of food (Lappe 2013), with the term *hunger* the emphasis is placed on people rather than food (Burchi and De Muro 2012). For the purpose of this article, the terms are used interchangeably with the overall focus on hunger in the higher education context.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

While recent studies focusing on student hunger have explored its' prevalence and contributing factors quantitatively, little is known about students' own views of the problem experienced by them and more specifically, about the ways in which students define or conceptualise hunger. Heeding the call for qualitative explorations of student hunger, a participatory action research (PAR) project was undertaken whereby students generated ways to address student hunger. The first phase of the project is reported in this article and aimed to answer the question: How do students conceptualise hunger?

Understanding how students conceptualise hunger can aid institutions of higher education and other role-players to plan interventions that are relevant and sustainable.

THE DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY

Since the 1970s, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has coordinated processes to formulate, interrogate and update the globally accepted definition of food security. As a result of these processes, four dimensions of food security have been established.

The dimension of availability refers to the sufficiency of food against the demand for it (Pinstrup-Andersen 2009). When the FAO was first established, the widely held belief was that there was a lack of sufficient food to feed the world's population (Simon 2012). Yet increased food production at the time did not bring hunger to an end (Lappe and Collins 1979; 1986). Therefore, it was realised that the availability of food alone is not enough to address hunger.

While food may be available, the way in which it is distributed points to the dimension of access. Factors that act as barriers for people to access food include (but are not limited to) lack of income, not having access to the market where food is sold, and the ways in which food is distributed within and between households (Burchi, Fanzo, and Frison 2011; Simon 2012).

With the dimension of utilisation, the focus is on the person who has food available and is able to access it, yet the quality of the food and nutritional value is lacking. This may be due to the methods used for conserving, processing, and preparing food (Simon 2012) and is influenced by people's levels of knowledge, education or socio-cultural practices (Burchi et al. 2011).

The fourth dimension, stability, underpins the first three dimensions and refers to the extent to which one's food security is a permanent and sustainable situation (Simon 2012).

While each of the four dimensions could lead to different actions taken in addressing the issue, Burchi et al. (2011) advocate for a response that is inclusive of all the dimensions or conceptualisations; hence, a holistic and multi-sectoral approach.

METHODOLOGY

The context of the study is one institution of higher education in South Africa. Spread out over a wide geographical area, the institution offers a broad range of degree and diploma courses. More than 28 000 students are registered with the institution and stay either at on-campus residences, off-campus accredited accommodation, private accommodation, or study from home. The institution is located in one of the poorest provinces of the country and attracts students mainly from this province.

As stated previously, this study formed part of a broader PAR research project. Participants for the broader project were recruited from the total student population via the official communication system (emails) of the institution. A group of seven students from different study fields volunteered to participate. This included the fields of accounting, law, engineering, psychology and social work. The students were in their second, third, or fourth years of study at the time. One student was male, while the rest of the group was female. Pseudonyms are used to refer to the students in this article.

Once recruited, the group employed the visual participatory data-collection tool of photovoice for the conceptualisation phase. This tool was selected because of its potential to promote critical dialogue (Wang 1999), enable the student voice and encourage students to explore their own reality (Burkholder et al. 2015).

Following the guidelines of De Lange (2017), a preparatory workshop took place where the purpose, rationale and ethical considerations of photovoice were discussed. The group members received the following prompt: What does student hunger look like at this higher education institution? The participants could choose to complete the activity individually or in pairs, and to take between ten and fifteen photographs with their cell phones. The group had one week to respond to the prompt.

While institutional approval and ethical clearance for the broader research project (including photovoice) was obtained before the preparatory workshop (H17-HEA-SDP-013), the ethical considerations concerning photovoice were discussed at the preparatory workshop.

After the session where the discussion of the photographs took place, the participants were asked to write down individually the things that stood out from the photographs and the discussion – the inductive codes (Elo and Kyngas 2008). After capturing the codes, those that seemed to refer to similar things were grouped together. The process of abstraction was repeated until main themes with subthemes were established. In this way, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was applied. After the conclusion of the coding process, the group of participants picked the photographs that best represented the themes and subthemes.

The last step of the photovoice process involved the dissemination of data (Wang 1999). The selected photographs were displayed at several activities that were undertaken in subsequent phases of the broader research project.

FINDINGS

The participants conceptualised student hunger in two ways: *hunger of the stomach* and *hunger of the mind*. These two conceptualisations are discussed as themes together with a third theme: the relationship between the two emergent types of hunger.

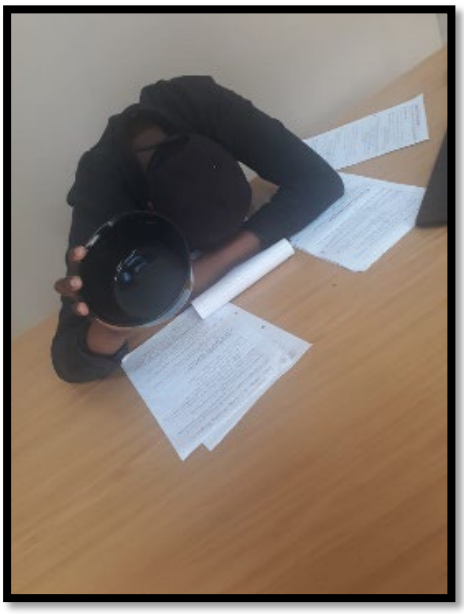
Theme 1: Hunger of the stomach

Hunger of the stomach is associated with the feeling and experience of physical hunger. Nandi summed it up as "hunger of the stomach, which is you needing food right now, because you have nothing at all".

In exploring the concept of hunger of the stomach, three subthemes emerged, each providing a different element to the concept.

Subtheme 1: Lack of food

The first subtheme refers to the absence of food; not having anything to eat. Thus, student hunger is defined as a physical state of literally not having enough to eat while studying at a tertiary institution. Amanda captured this understanding in an image (Photograph 1) of a student who holds out an empty bowl while lying on her arms over her study materials.

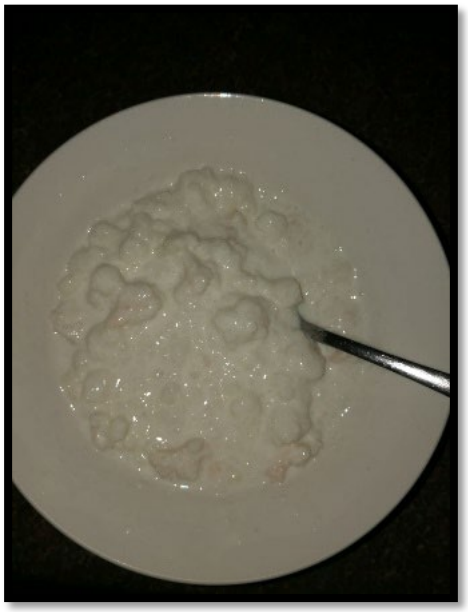


Photograph 1: Studying on an empty stomach (Photo credit: research participants)

Hunger of the stomach as the lack of food, although termed differently, is a concept that has been investigated and explored in a growing number of research studies recently in South Africa (Dominguez-Whitehead 2017; Poinoosawmy 2015; Rudolph et al. 2018; Sabi et al. 2020). This literal meaning of student hunger as the absence of food is aligned to the notions shared by students who participated in a qualitative study (Ntloko 2018), in which students defined student hunger inter alia as deprivation and lack of fulfilment of basic needs.

Subtheme 2: Limited variety

While hunger of the stomach could refer to students having no food to eat, another element was elevated, namely that of having food, but a limited variety. As part of the photovoice process, Zee and Sisanda labelled their image (Photograph 2) "daily bread" and described it as follows: "This is samp. And we said 'daily bread'. Because some people cook a whole lot of samp [South African food consisting of dried corn kernels] so that they could just warm it ... and it's the most cheapest and affordable ... That was what the student had left, only the samp. So that was what she had for the rest of the month."



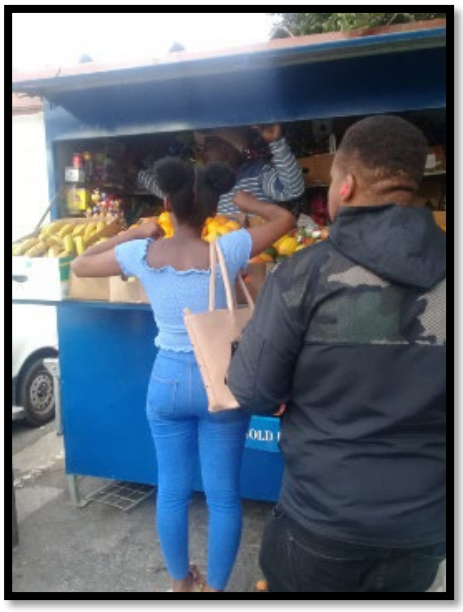
Photograph 2: Daily bread (Photo credit: research participants)

According to the students, it is considered hunger if you have food, but not enough variety and nutrients. It often happens that students lack variety in their diet, eating what is available, and often only one thing. Similar to Zee and Sisanda's words about samp for each meal, Poinoosawmy (2015) found that starchy foods were consumed most frequently by students.

Subtheme 3: Healthy affordable available options

Another element to conceptualising hunger of the stomach is related to the food options on campus.

According to the participants, the food options on campus were limited in terms of healthy choices and in terms of affordability. They were appreciative of a blue container (see Photograph 3) that offered fruit at affordable prices. However, they could not identify any other affordable healthy options on campus.



Photograph 3: Healthy affordable option (Photo credit: research participants)

The specific campus with which the group of students are familiar has a courtyard that was established as a hub where food trucks operate daily. However, the participants were critical about the available options at this food court. Nandi explained, "There is one that ... is usually the cheapest there. So it usually has the longest line. It sells fatcakes, muffins, all these affordable things, but are still junk food. Accessible to us. It's the cheapest that you get on the food trucks that are there." Thus, the available food was described as either too expensive or unhealthy.

Theme 2: Hunger of the mind

The second type of hunger that emerged from the photovoice process, is hunger of the mind. While hunger of the stomach refers to not having food and/or not having the resources to acquire food, hunger of the mind is when a person does have the resources but do not use them to acquire food. Hunger of the stomach is prevalent at the beginning of the academic year – when

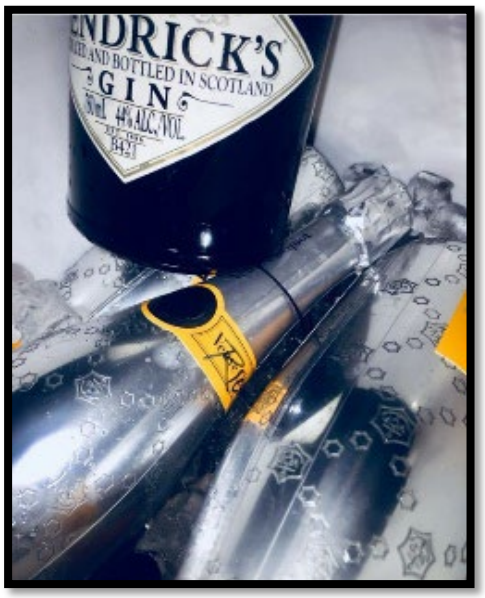
student funding is not in place or delayed, paid late, or inconsistent. On the other hand, hunger of the mind is prevalent once students have received the funding and they have access to food. Apart from tuition fees, students may decide how to spend the funding received. When the money is not spent on food or healthy nutritious food, this is called hunger of the mind.

In Zanele's words, "hunger of the mind is closely linked to having choices. You have food or the means to buy food, but it is up to you how you spend that money or the food. So hunger of the mind is not being able to make well-founded choices of how you spend the money responsibly or not being able to channel it to the right direction."

Nandi described her understanding of the concept (hunger of the mind) as follows: "I was going to say like, now, like with the pictures, it now says that we don't only face the challenge of the hunger of the stomach. It goes way beyond that. Because now we're finding factors that lead there. The thing of the pictures that we now get is that there are factors that contribute to us getting to the hunger of the stomach that most of the time we just avoid completely. Students are hungry, but what causes them to be hungry? ... We've been jumping straight to 'let's buy them packages, let's give them food', but not thinking really."

Thus, there was a realisation that hunger of the stomach was known and at the time being addressed through food handouts, while hunger of the mind was hidden, not addressed and requiring a different and more complex response.

Zee and Sisanda provided the caption "Choices" to Photograph 4 of bottles of alcohol, showing how some students decide to prioritise alcohol above food.



Photograph 4: Choices (Photo credit: research participants)

However, it refers to other choices as well: prioritising social evenings at night clubs, take-away food, and clothes. Nandi gave the following example: "In all of our trashes and crates you find Steers, Burger King, this junk food. Our money goes there."

Luvuyo shared a personal experience: "So this guy like, he would open accounts at Truworths and Markhams and I'm like, man, why can't you wait to have the money, then you buy it. Now you would see this guy is having no food now."

While many factors contribute to the choices that students make, four subthemes are discussed: not knowing how to work with money, outward appearances, masking one's background, and sense of belonging.

Subtheme 1: Not knowing how to work with money

The first contributing factor refers to students' reported lack of knowledge and skills in financial literacy. Before 2019, NSFAS transferred funds to qualifying students via vouchers, and accommodation was paid for via academic institutions. After consultation with student leaders and other stakeholders, the method of transfer was changed to cash payments – with allowances being paid directly into students' bank accounts. According to the NSFAS spokesperson, Kagisho Mamabolo, this was done to respect students' right to make their own decisions about where and how they spend their allowances (Cohen 2019). As much as students supported and appreciated this decision, the participants reflected on their observations and experiences that many students do not know how to work with large sums of money.

> "Because now they're giving out these large amounts to students that can't handle it. Because at least you knew it's this minimum amount ... OK, it IS large if you're not used to it, but now you can manage it. Now it's giving money for private accommodation, money for this, money for that, it's just money coming in. And you just don't know what to do with it." (Nandi).

These findings concur with the work of Tomaselli (2010), who found that some students did not have the skills to budget and manage food purchases.

For many students, it is the first time that they have the freedom to make choices about money and resources. Students' lack of knowledge could be attributed to lack of experience in managing finances. Sisanda said, "You're not used to this large amount of money when you're here".

It could also be attributed to a poverty background where students were not exposed to large amounts of money. Nandi gave the example of a family being sustained by an old-age grant: "Because kaloku [meaning 'you know' in isiXhosa] we're not used to ... like really, you're coming from a home that never, only maybe sees a thousand rand when your

grandmother gets paid at the end of the month. And now you basically have three times that amount in your bank account. So what do you do with that? When you're used to working around a thousand rand for a whole ... month."

The next contributing factor that became clear from the data analysis was prioritising outward appearances.

Subtheme 2: Prioritizing outward appearances

In line with the psychologist Erik Erikson's theory of life cycle development (Douvan 1996), outward appearances and the approval of peers are important to students as young adults. This manifests in the clothes that are worn, accessories like mobile phones, and spending money to buy alcohol.

One participant described how a family member shifted from hunger of the stomach to hunger of the mind, lacking in knowledge of financial management and prioritising outward appearances.

> "So there's also that thing of you want people to know ... for example, I have a cousin – she's first year – when she came here, she stayed with me for a few days. I took her food shopping. I feel like it was her first time ever food shopping. She didn't know anything, OK. A few months later ... no, no February, i-NSFAS comes through. Hey, my cousin is flourishing: pictures of this, of nice things, of nice times. This is of a person I one hundred percent know doesn't know how to handle money. And this is what she is doing." (Karabo).

This concurs with the findings of studies by Letseka (2007) and Tomaselli (2010), who reported that students redirected their funds by spending money on designer clothes, alcohol, and social gatherings.

Decisions about spending resources on outward appearances could be influenced by role models and perceptions about what constitutes a good life, as well as peer pressure. Nandi and Sisanda discussed the influence of role models, referring to political figures and agreeing that academically performing students are not recognised.

> Nandi: "And another thing: our role models here at the university are always the people who are like ANC Youth League and all these guys. And they all so nice and can spin money and they do parties. So you idolise people that are actually pushing that thing of you need to have these certain clothes, you need to have this type of lifestyle if you want to fit in this environment. You don't look at all these ones that are straight A students, getting 90%, ha-ah. Ok, whatever. We don't idolise them. But we idolise the ones who come with ..."
>
> Sisanda: "This lifestyle."
>
> Nandi: "We idolise people who are flaunting, who have the life."

Zee added that the perceived lifestyles of the role models become the ideal lifestyles that students strive for: "We just want to think in this small box of: this is where I am right now, I need to live this lifestyle, I need to do that."

The phenomenon of peer pressure among students was captured in the isiXhosa saying "Bazo thini abantu?" – meaning "What would people say?" It is very important to students how others perceive them, and to obtain the perceptions that they want people to have. Some students would use their resources meant to satisfy hunger of the stomach for other things.

> "For example let's say your roommate comes from a good background and she can buy take-aways. Three times a week. And you also get influenced in that, but knowing you only have, let's say a thousand rand, just for the month. So it's also you being able to control your, the pressure you get from around, the people." (Sisanda).

Weaves were a popular talking point as an example of peer pressure. According to the online Oxford dictionaries (oxforddictionaries.com), a weave is: "a hairstyle created by weaving pieces of real or artificial hair into a person's existing hair, typically in order to increase its length or thickness".

Photograph 5: Peer pressure (Photo credit: research participants)

The picture of weaves (photograph 5) was explained by Nandi, "Peer pressure. We follow each other blindly as people. You take the little money you have, you invest in this. Most students that are under NSFAS own a pair of this. And this is like 3 grand to 1 point 5, depending on the inches. So this peer pressure fake hair, money goes there."

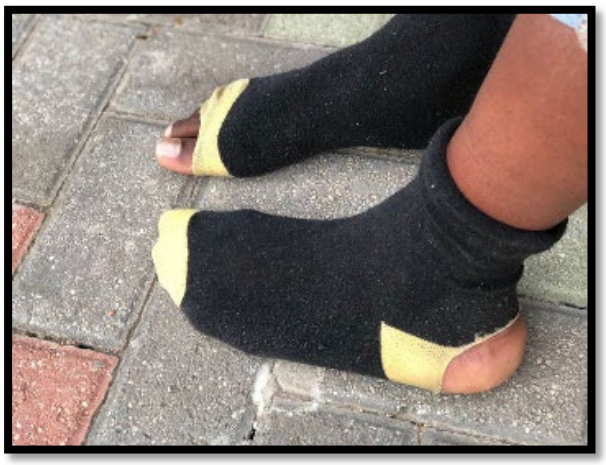
The decision by students to spend money meant for food, on outward appearances, reminds of the theory of conspicuous consumption, developed by Veblen in the 19th century.

Conspicuous or visible consumption refers to acquiring items that are observable in social interactions (Kaus 2010). In research conducted to understand the visible consumption patterns of the middle class in South Africa, Burger et al. (2015) noted significant differences between the emerging and established middle classes, with the emerging middle class spending more on visible consumption. They attributed this to their vulnerable position, having to prove their membership by means of outward appearances. More research is required to understand the extent and effect of classism in higher education, but the findings show that for some students, how they are perceived by those around them is so important that they spend resources meant for food on outward appearances.

Subtheme 3: Masking one's background

A third contributing factor to hunger of the mind, is derived from students' tendency to hide their social class – their intergenerational socio-cultural background (Jones and Vagle 2013) – and portray a different (more affluent) status. The preferred status is portrayed through the way money is spent, the food that is acquired, and the accessories that one owns.

There was consensus in the research group that the student culture of spending the resources that you have on what society will approve of, is greatly influenced by the need to mask oneself, to pretend one is somebody one is not. This was illustrated by the picture (Photograph 6) which shows that when one takes off a student's shoes, one might find socks with holes in them. This is a metaphor for the outside appearance of a person not matching the inside self-image. In other words, they might not look hungry on the outside, but they might be physically and mentally hungry on the inside.



Photograph 6: What things look like beneath the surface (Photo credit: research participants)

Nandi explained the masking of physical hunger as follows: "You carry a bottle of water, no-one can tell that you're hungry. Drink this the whole day, no-one will ask you what's happening. And you hide behind this bottle of water. Because everyone just assumes you're drinking this water, because you're on diet or something like that. But this keeps your tummy ... keeps my tummy full all throughout the day."

Relating it to hunger of the mind, the masking is about who a person is. Nandi explained, "Uhm, I would say you mask yourself. You hide who you are, in my sense. Because you know the home you come from as a person. You step up out of the home that's barely meeting needs, but you get to university, you meet friends .... So you mask yourself just to fit in with a group of people that you feel are in a way better than you. You try to fit in so much that you lose yourself trying to fit in."

Karabo agreed that students mask who they are because of their perception of being of low status in society: "Something that influences who we are unfortunately is our social standing. So that's what I think we try to conceal: our social standing, which is directly linked to our background. So again it goes back to hiding of ourselves."

The participants further alluded to the psychological distress they experienced from having to hide their poverty. In the current study, this distress was verbalised as a strain on the individual. The following extract from a discussion illustrates this:

Zee: "Why must we put effort into it?"

Luvuyo: "Because we are poor."

Zee: "But you are poor, so why not go for a Mr Price short than go for a Truworths short?"

Sisanda: "Because I don't want people to think I'm poor."

Luvuyo: "Exactly."

Zee: "I understand that. That's what I was asking. Why do we have to? Because you're straining yourself. You want people to say you look beautiful. ... I think it's something of self-esteem if I may go back to that as well. Or self-image. Something there."

In 2010, Firfirey and Carolissen published an article about students' experiences of poverty at a South African university. The quote of a student in the title of the article ("I keep myself clean ... at least when you see me, you don't know I am poor") concurs with students' responses and reflections in this study. Firfirey and Carolissen (2010) found that qualitative experiences of poverty in higher education was not well documented in South Africa. Because of the stigma attached to poverty, it is hidden (masked) and not spoken about freely. Another intersecting element that is not well documented, is students' subjective experiences and self-definition of social class (Rubin et al. 2014). Although research on the influence of social class (as an

objective measure) on higher education abound in South Africa (Badat 2010; Leibowitz and Bozalek 2014; Reddy 2004), the emerged contributing factor – masking one's background – indicates how subjective experiences of social class contribute to the decisions students make.

Subtheme 4: Seeking a sense of belonging

At the heart of spending resources to acquire societal approval and to mask one's poverty background is the need for a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging refers to students' sense of feeling at home and being emotionally attached to the institution of higher learning (Yuval-Davis 2011).

While peer pressure pushes students into making choices whereby they prioritise socially acceptable items rather than food, the need to belong and to hide their background and poverty renders them vulnerable to that perceived peer pressure. Zenele shared practical examples of situations where students experienced such pressure and reflected on the real source of the perceived coercion, namely the pressure the individual puts on him-/herself to fit in and belong to the student society:

> "... like if you were associating yourself with friends who are of high standard and what-what, and then maybe they say on Friday: Let's go out or let's buy this. Like how about we order a pizza or what-what. You're sitting there with them. You know you don't have enough money to buy that pizza. Maybe today you say: No I don't feel like eating pizza, when you actually want pizza. But you can't afford. And then next time, you keep giving them excuses, they can: Oh like why are you so stingy, and what not. And then they don't understand your situation. And then you put a pressure on you. You feel that, like the pressure. So I think that it can be real. Even if you're coming from home to res for the first time. You meet your roommates for the first time. And then you get to see the type of food they eat or the kind of things they have. So then you feel like, ja, I don't fit here. And you're trying to meet their standards ... if people can be aware that it's ok to say no or I can't afford, because I think that's the most difficult thing really for some people. To think: what are they going to think of me, like how are they going to view me?"

Students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion at higher education institutions have been under the research spotlight in South Africa, especially in relation to factors like race (Liccardo 2018; Shabalala 2018) and gender (Bradbury and Mashigo 2018; Kessi 2018). Xulu-Gama et al. (2018) suggest that more research should be conducted into students' development of a sense of belonging and identity.

Theme 3: Cyclical relationship between two types of hunger

Participants explained the occurrence of and relationship between hunger of the stomach and hunger of the mind as follows: Hunger of the stomach is mostly an issue for students who arrive at the university for the first time and/or at the beginning of the year. This is when they either

do not have the resources to buy food and/or the resources on which they are depending (bursaries and other financial support) because it is delayed for a couple of weeks or months. Thus, some students are physically hungry.

Once the financial support resources become available, hunger of the stomach is satisfied. Some students now have the resources to satisfy their physical hunger, but do not necessarily use it for this purpose. Because of the choices that students make to not spend their money on food or nutritious food or to plan and budget to have money (and food) until the end of the month or academic year, their financial resources become depleted. At this point, hunger of the stomach occurs again. Students then rely on the institution or other programmes for food-related assistance.

It is worth noting that students concluded with a sense that hunger of the mind is a concept less explored than the concept of hunger of the stomach, while agreeing that hunger of the mind needs to be attended to in order to address student hunger effectively.

> "I also realise the ... the ... bigger gap is hunger of the mind. Not ... I don't think anyone is targeting the hunger of the mind. Besides the mentoring programme. I mean, it's not even to the extent that we wishing to touch on. It's just to do with depression and mental illness and stuff like that. Or not being able to handle school work – like what the student counselling is doing already. I don't think any other initiative is tackling responsibilities and peer pressure and choices, like ... hunger of the mind is where the problem is generally." (Amanda)

DISCUSSION

Students' conceptualisations of student hunger revealed two types: hunger of the stomach and hunger of the mind. When students are physically hungry due to not having food available, they experience hunger of the stomach. Hunger of the stomach also includes situations where students may have food available, but a limited variety thereof; therefore, they eat the same type of food every day. The definition was further extended to include environmental barriers that constrain students' access to food: The available food is inaccessible when it is unaffordable to students, only available during certain periods, and if healthy food options are limited.

While participants in this study did not allude to the challenges associated with accessing food off campus, other South African studies have shown that students lack capabilities in terms of time to acquire, prepare, and cook food, and mobility to acquire food (Crush, Frayne, and McLachlan 2011; Dominguez-Whitehead 2015). With regard to accessing food, the greatest barrier that emerged from the current research study was financial difficulties; students having no or insufficient funds to acquire food. Amongst others, the NSFAS was instituted to increase the nutritional capabilities of students by providing allowances that could be utilised to acquire

food. Yet this has not been achieved because, according to students, the allocated amounts are insufficient or payments are delayed. This intersects with the stability dimension in the sense that students' access to the resources to acquire food are not stable when there are funding delays.

The second type of hunger that was conceptualised by the participants is hunger of the mind. This refers to situations where students receive the necessary funds to acquire food, but do not utilise it for that purpose. The choices that some students make once they have received funding do not include food or healthy, nutritious food. These choices could lead them back to hunger of the stomach. Because their resources are depleted, they rely on the institution or other programmes for food-related assistance.

Considering students' perceptions about the aspects that contribute to hunger of the mind, the findings revealed four factors. The first factor is a lack of knowledge and skills in financial literacy. Many students either have never had the freedom to make their own financial decisions or come from a poverty background where they were not exposed to substantial amounts of money. A second contributing factor is the utilisation of resources meant for food to prioritise outward appearances. The participants described a dominant culture where students' notion of what is valuable is influenced by the appearances of role models (like student leaders) and peers. According to this culture, well-being is portrayed through visible consumables like clothes, mobile phones, hair, and alcohol. A student culture has developed around displaying fashionable and socially acceptable items. Reasons why students are vulnerable to the prevalent culture are found in the two remaining factors.

The third factor contributing to hunger of the mind, is the perceived tendency among some students to mask their poverty backgrounds due to shame about their social class. Similarly, some students attempt to mask their physical hunger. Participants also alluded to the possibility that students hide low self-esteem. The fourth factor is the need for a sense of belonging. This need, coupled with peer pressure to fit in, contributes to students' susceptibility to a culture where visible consumption is prioritised over food.

CONCLUSION

While the students' conceptualisation of hunger of the stomach (physical hunger) is a known phenomenon in recent South African literature, the concept of hunger of the mind is not and has implications for intervention. If interventions are responding only to hunger of the stomach and are not cognisant of the conceptualisations of students (as the ones experiencing hunger), the cycle of student hunger continues, while programmes do not address the issue comprehensively and sustainably.

Because the research sample in this study was small, it is recommended that more research be undertaken to explore the nature of food and resource utilisation by students. However the significance of these conceptualisations is that they suggest that addressing student hunger is more complex than providing food to students.

Contributors

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