



Exploring community resilience:  
**An application of  
photovoice in  
post-graduate studies**

This brief provides an overview of how Photovoice methodology was incorporated into the post-graduate psychology programme at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. The photovoice method aims to facilitate student engagement within their communities and enable them to investigate the concept of resilience from their own unique viewpoints and perspectives.

In this application of the photovoice method to a post-graduate course, students are tasked with employing the photovoice methodology to identify and document what they personally consider to be the defining elements of resilience within their respective communities.

Through the lens of their cameras, students capture the everyday moments, stories, and visuals that they believe embody resilience.

This approach not only **encourages a deeper understanding** of the concept but also allows for a **more nuanced and community-centric exploration of resilience**.

As participants in the photovoice project, students gain valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of resilience, as well as the complex dynamics within their communities. They learn to recognize the strengths, challenges, and untapped resources that contribute to resilience, fostering a richer understanding of community well-being.

Moreover, this experiential learning opportunity within a post-graduate psychology program not only enhances students' research and observational skills but also cultivates their cultural competence and critical thinking abilities. By actively engaging with their communities and utilising the photovoice methodology, **students can potentially become advocates for positive change**, possibly promoting resilience and well-being within the very communities they study.



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Consortium for Equitable Disaster Resilience



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# Photovoice incorporation

Photovoice is a qualitative tool used in community-based participatory research to identify local issues and to facilitate local solutions, through the gathering of participant-taken photographs and narratives. Photovoice can aid in translating experience into actionable knowledge, promoting dialogue and community improvement.



**Training.** Students attended compulsory training which orientated them to the Photovoice methodology and methods. Training focused on ethics, best practice and how Photovoice can promote restorative social justice.



**Gathering resilience themes photos/narratives with narratives/descriptions.** Students were required use Photovoice to document what they regard as reflecting or representing resilience within their communities, using a camera/ smartphone or other available device enabling clear high-resolution images. A consent form was provided to students for any data gathered from community members and images of persons or private entities.



**Individual presentations.** Students were each required to do a 15 minute presentation showcasing their Photovoice work, followed by questions and reflections from the class group. Students were encouraged to be creative, using multimodal approaches to present their work.



**Reflective journal.** Students kept an audio-visual reflective journal to document their experiences of engaging with Photovoice and reflect on the process. Students were provided with questions to guide their reflective journal:

- What did I learn about Photovoice that stood out for me?
- Is there anything about this methodology that would be challenging for me?
- How and why did I decide what to capture in my Photovoice?
- What does this image/video represent or say about me and my community?
- How do I feel about what imagery I have included?
- What do I hope that other people will see and learn about me and my community?



**Interviews with students.** The aim of these interviews is to generate information on understandings of equitable resilience in the South African context and arrive at a shared definition. Interviews were conducted via videoconferencing, email and/or WhatsApp calls, and delved into student's personal reflections on the Photovoice method.



**Further research.** The outputs will be used in education and training for graduate students from Southern Africa, and create a pathway to undertake research and projects related to disaster management and resilience that actively contribute to building equitable resilience.



# Student SUBMISSIONS



Photovoice evoked a sense of pride in the resilience that is portrayed against the difficult conditions that our communities are experiencing. In the beginning we were all struggling to understand how we are supposed to capture resilience in our communities, but as the lecture engaged with us and had more training about the photovoice method it became easier to understand the best way to capture and to summarise it.

STUDENT 1





“ By investing in education, the school nurtures the next generation of community leaders who can contribute to Morningstar’s resilience and progress.



Morningstar community resilience  
STUDENT 2



## Community Resilience

I RESIDED IN THE SAME PLACE FOR +-17 YEARS. I HAVEN'T LIVED THERE IN 4 YEARS AND, SINCE THEN, I HAVEN'T FELT A SENSE OF COMMUNITY. AS A RESULT, I STRUGGLED CHOOSING A COMMUNITY TO SPEAK ABOUT.  
IN HONOUR OF **BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH**, THIS BRING US TO...

Breast cancer and the resilience of a family  
STUDENT 3



“ I thought it important to emphasise the resilience of women in particular, in the breast cancer community... I view myself part of this community is because three of the most important women in my life suffered with breast cancer.



Community resilience in Mfuleni and Guguletu  
STUDENT 4

“ Poverty can be dealt with at a communal level with minimal resources as seen with Isiphosabantu’s founder. The Amy (Biehl) Foundation shows how an horrific incident was used to fight against the violence of poverty.



Photovoice of the Scenery Park community  
STUDENT 5

“ To counteract the negative narratives surrounding the Scenery Park community, this photovoice project captured some of the positive aspects of the community in order to change the narrative.



Muslim resilience in a predominantly Christian-Afrikaans town, Stellenbosch  
STUDENT 6

“ I realised that I walked past these buildings and signs and hardly thought anything about it. Taking a moment to really capture a picture, to think and reflect on it made me realise that my community has a rich history which is hardly spoken about.

## Outcomes

Photovoice provided a well-suited theoretical basis for students to engage with course content, including participatory action oriented approaches, counterstorytelling, resilience and other globally and situated epistemic justice framework/orientations.





# SARA's work towards building equitable resilience in Southern Africa

Since 2022, the Southern African Resilience Academy (SARA) has supported collaborative working groups to pursue inter- or transdisciplinary synthesis research under the guiding theme of **“Building equitable resilience in Southern Africa”**.

This is in line with SARA's role as a convening and support space for researchers and practitioners working across Southern Africa to engage around pressing resilience and development challenges in the region.

SARA is an initiative of the Global Resilience Partnership (GRP), with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The academy's goals are to strengthen existing expert networks, expand collaboration, and facilitate the co-production of policy and practice-relevant knowledge.

Through its links with other regional networks, SARA aims to contribute directly and meaningfully to regional and global policy discussions around resilience and development, and elevate the Southern African voice in international fora.

SARA is coordinated by the Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST) at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. It is co-funded by the South African Research Chair in Social-Ecological Systems and Resilience.

#### For more information on SARA, contact:

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#### WORKING GROUP: Disaster Risk

The construct of resilience has been critiqued for its failure to account for differential vulnerability and to consider issues related to social justice, equity, and inclusion. Equitable resilience has emerged as a concept that aims to recognize that vulnerabilities and capacities are not evenly distributed across societies. With the significant increase in disaster-related events in Southern Africa, a better understanding is needed on how to achieve equity among those impacted the most. However, the majority of research on equitable resilience has emerged from high-income countries, with limited studies focusing on conceptualizing this construct within the context of developing countries, specifically the Global South. Our project aims to address this gap. Through a series of activities, including an advanced mixed-methods pilot study which utilized group concept mapping, we holistically explored equitable resilience in a contextually grounded manner to elucidate the construct of equitable resilience within the context of Southern Africa (SADC).

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Available here:



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