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## Child Agency: Adolescents-Led Community Service Initiatives in Yemen

Shaima Mohammed Alrai  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Shaima Mohammed Alrai

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Child Agency: Adolescents-Led Community Service Initiatives in Yemen

by

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MA, Walden University, 2017

MA, Maastricht School of Management, 2008

BS, Sana'a University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

August 2020

## Abstract

Research has provided evidence that child participation and agency can contribute to child protection. Child participation and agency in the context of war and conflicts are still under-researched. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the agency experiences of adolescents in Yemen in implementing and leading community service initiatives following participating in a youth empowerment program. Using Zimmerman's empowerment theory to guide the study, 5 people aged between 18 and 22 years who had participated in a program were interviewed about their agency experience when they were adolescents. Narrative data was analyzed using thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis. Archival photos and documents were analyzed and included in the data. Study findings included (a) positive impacts of child agency, (b) the value of adult mentorship, (c) lack of awareness about child participation, (d) deficiencies within the Yemeni education system, and (e) possible secondary negative consequences of child agency. The main result of the study is a child agency model, which explains how child agency consists of inputs, process, and outputs. More research is recommended to explore the deficiencies in the educational system and child protection in the context of child participation and agency programming. Campaigns to raise awareness about children's rights to participation are recommended. Findings may be used by international human rights organizations to promote child participation, agency, and empowerment.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, husband, two lovely children, and my life-changing mentor. I dedicate it to my father, who always encouraged me to fulfill my dreams and has given me all my inspiration. My father has always stood by me like a ladder to the sky. I dedicate it to my mother, who always embraces me with love and encouragement and showers me with warm prayers that guide my way. I dedicate it to my husband, who is always there for me. He was the shelter in the difficult times and the wall I always leaned on during this journey. To Dr. Fatima, to whom I owe everything nice happened to me. I would not be where and who I am today without these incredible people in my life.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Child participation is one of the four guiding principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which stresses that children have the right to express their opinions, to be taken seriously, and to take part in making decisions on issues affecting them (United Nations [UN], 1989). Child participation is a fundamental principle that is a requirement for other child rights to be realized (UNICEF, 2014). Although children's right to participation is a guiding principle, in many societies around the world, several researchers found that it is still tokenistic, because some children cannot express themselves and are expected to follow their parents and elders who are considered to understand best (Ruiz-Casares, Collins, Tisdall, & Grover, 2017).

Yemen has been at war since March 2015, which has resulted in a damaged economy and infrastructure as well as food insecurity (World Bank, 2019). According to the UN, Yemen is experiencing the world's most serious humanitarian crisis in the world (World Bank, 2019). The ongoing war has caused a growing vulnerability of children in Yemen (UNICEF, 2019) as they are subject to different forms of violence, abuse, and neglect (UNICEF, 2017, 2019; U.S. Department of Labor [USDOL], 2017).

Chapter 1 is an introduction to my study, starting with background information, including a brief overview of the literature review relating to the scope of this study and a description of gaps in the literature. In this chapter, I discuss the research problem, the purpose of the study, as well as the study question. I then describe the empowerment theory as my conceptual framework and how it aligned with studying child participation.

Further, I briefly describe the nature, methodology, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of my study.

### **Background**

Children's vulnerabilities are increasing due to the ongoing war in Yemen (UNICEF, 2019). It is estimated that between 2017 and 2018, children's marriage rates have tripled. Armed forces recruitment of children is ongoing and extreme forms of child labor are growing (UNICEF, 2019). However, the most recent research has showed that child participation leads to empowerment (Anyon, Kennedy, Durbahn, & Jenson, 2018; Gersch, Lipscomb, Stoyles, & Caputi, 2014; Johnson, 2017; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Rivera & Santos, 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2018), and can challenge these abuses by helping children gain skills, broaden aspirations, and improve self-esteem and confidence (Lansdown et al. 2014; Percy-Smith & Burns 2013).

The right to participation is one of the four guiding principles of the UNCRC that represent the fundamental requirements for the other rights to be realized (UNICEF, 2014). Child participation empowers children and increases their agencies (Sharp, 2014). As described by Sharp (2014), "Agency is a feeling that someone has the ability to change something about themselves or their environment (for a valued goal) ..." (p. 348). Agency is linked to hope, self-determination, empowerment, initiative, and self-efficacy (Sharp, 2014), which are all required for healthy self-development (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013).

These studies highlighted the significance and benefits of child participation to children and to their society (Lansdown et al., 2014; Percy-smith & Burns, 2013;

Zimmerman et al., 2018). Child participation and child protection are interrelated, because children can play a more efficient role in issues influencing them by empowering them (Lansdown et al. 2014); therefore, child participation is needed to support child protection (Collins, 2017; Houghton, 2015; McCafferty, 2017; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017; Tisdall, 2017).

Although it sounds contradictory, a child can be an agent and vulnerable at the same time (Collins, 2017), which sometimes makes child participation and protection challenging in practice. Although enough theoretical support is provided for child participation, child participation is not well practiced in international child protection (Collins, 2017). Child participation involves limitations and opportunities, whether acknowledged, negotiated, or resisted (Stoecklin & Fattore, 2018). Challenging issues continue to reveal, including a limited understanding of children and their capacity, a limited awareness on child participation as a right as well as power struggles and institutional obstacles (Collins, 2017; Vanner, 2014).

Although significant results were highlighted in the literature on child participation, I did not find research that explored or examined the impact of child agency experiences on children development and resilience in Yemen. In addition, most of the research studies I reviewed were performed in nonconflict settings. Further study into child participation and agency in emergencies, such as conflicts and war, is therefore needed. I did not find studies on child participation in the context of war. I, therefore, aimed to study child participation among young people in Yemen by building on the results of previous child participation research.



## **Problem Statement**

Children's vulnerability in Yemen is increasing due to the ongoing war since 2015 (UNICEF, 2019). Children in Yemen are subject to different forms of violence, abuse, and neglect (UNICEF, 2019; USDOL, 2017; UNICEF, 2017). The UN (UNGASC, 2018) verified that 842 boys were recruited to participate in armed conflicts in 2017. Although the majority of the boys were aged between 15 and 17 years, there were some of them who were as young as 11 years old (UNGASC, 2018).

Early marriage is another issue of child abuse. The results of a Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) questionnaire completed by 1,054 people conducted in six governorates in Yemen indicated that 72.5% of respondents reported they were married before the age of 18 years, and 44.5% were married at the age of 15 years or younger (UNICEF, 2017). Children married at an early age are not vulnerable to abuse only; they might also experience risks associated with pregnancy, one of the main causes of death among girls aged 15 to 19 years (UNFPA, 2016). Children in Yemen are also engaged in different forms of labor, such as fishing, begging, and domestic work (USDOL, 2017). Children are also used for guarding checkpoints, patrolling, and working in the battlefields to provide food and bring water in the current armed conflict (UNGASC, 2018).

These abuse experiences and harmful practices negatively impact children's wellbeing and development (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014). Adults' perception of seeing children as passive objects makes their participation and privacy rights ignored, thus decreasing their resiliency and agency (Smith, 2016). In addition,

there is limited awareness and understanding of participation as a right among families and communities (Vanner, 2014).

Child participation is a fundamental right in the UNCRC, a treaty that applies to children aged 18 years and younger. This treaty emphasizes that children have the right to express their views, be taken seriously, and participate and make decisions on matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989). Child participation rights identify children as citizens entitled to human rights, rather than passive receivers of adults' actions (Burns, 2013; Percy-Smith & Smith, 2016). Participation empowers children to respect differences and reinforces their capacities in peacefully resolving conflicts (Lansdown et al., 2014). Through participation, children can challenge situations of discrimination, threats, and abuse (Lansdown et al., 2014).

There have been some efforts to support children and young people through some developmental programs in Yemen. The youth program, run by a national Yemeni nongovernmental organization, is one of these programs that aims to empower adolescents by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to design and implement community service initiatives, such as cleaning, planting, and peer support, with the goal of enhancing their confidence, self-esteem, civic efficacy, and social skills.

Although evidences suggest that these young people have completed the program and engaged in community activities, I have not found any information or articles about their experiences and their perceptions and beliefs about their skills, their perceptions of their agency and empowerment, or how these adolescents perceive themselves after

implementing and leading these community service initiatives. It is not clear how these adolescents integrated their new skills into their daily living. This information may be important to inform the program developers or those who would want to develop programs for young people in other locations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the experiences of adolescents aged 13 to 17 years in Yemen who participated in a social agency experience in implementing and leading community service initiatives designed to contribute to the welfare of their communities. The study participants were youth aged 18 years and older who participated in a youth program when they were adolescents at ages 13 to 17 years. The study was on their experiences as adolescents in the youth program in designing, leading, and implementing community service initiatives, and how these experiences contributed to their development after the program as adolescents and today as adults. I explored how child agency experiences contributed to the welfare and development of children. Recent research (Dixon, Ward, & Blower, 2019; Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2018) shows how child participation leads to empowerment, but I did not find research on child participation in Yemen and in emergency context. Through this study, I aimed to contribute to the literature of child participation by adding to the field by inquiring child participation in emergency context.

### **Research Question**

With this qualitative multiple case study, I answered the following research question: What are the experiences of empowerment and agency in adolescents aged

between 13 and 17 years of leading community service projects with the goal of contributing to the welfare of their communities in Yemen? Although the study focus is on adolescents' experiences in leading and implementing community service initiatives, the study participants are youth older than 18 years sharing their adolescence experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000) as my theoretical framework. Empowerment theory involves processes that contribute to enabling individuals to effectively contribute to community change efforts (Zimmerman, 2000). In empowering processes, opportunities to elevate confidence, skills, control, competencies, and making decisions are key (Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman, 2011). For adolescents, such process may be achieved through working in a friendly and caring environment, contributing effectively to the community, and interacting with positive and constructive adults (Zimmerman, 2011). Using empowerment theory, I explored the experiences of adolescents who participated in the youth program. This program was established in 2008 by some of my colleagues and I, and it has been operating under a national nongovernmental organization in Yemen. This program aims at empowering adolescents by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to design and implement small community service initiatives.

I used the three components of the empowerment theory as established by Zimmerman (1995) and detailed in Zimmerman et al. (2018). The three components consist of the intrapersonal component (leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, self-esteem),

interactional component (adult mentorship, adult resources, resource mobilization), and behavioral component (leadership behavior, community engagement, school engagement). The purpose of the Zimmerman et al.'s Youth for Solution Program (1995) is similar to the youth program, through which the study participants implemented their community service initiatives. Thus, empowerment theory was a relevant framework for my study as well. Although I used the concepts and components of empowerment theory to lead my research, I did not tackle the content of the youth program because I did not aim to evaluate the program but rather learn about the adolescents' experiences.

### **Nature of the Study**

Because I studied the “how” of a current phenomenon—adolescents' agency experiences—and have less control over its events within real-life settings, I used a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design for my dissertation (Yin, 2017). I used empowerment theory as the theoretical framework to guide this study. Moreover, I used the youth empowerment pre- and post-questionnaire (Zimmerman et al., 2018) as a guide to developing the interview protocol and questions. Using this questionnaire, I used the three components as established by Zimmerman (1995) and detailed in Zimmerman et al. (2018) as my categories.

Each round of the youth program usually targets a number of cities, with approximately 10 to 20 children from each city. The sample of this study was four to six young people from four cities who participated in the youth program in 2015, which is the year the war started in Yemen (UNICEF, 2019). I conducted in-depth individual interviews with each participant. The participants were adults at the time of the study.

They shared their agency experiences that happened in 2015 during their adolescence. I used Yin's (2003) multiple case study process, starting with the individual interviews, writing the reports for each interview, to draw cross-case conclusions. In the multiple case study design, individuals are studied as separate units of study; therefore, the design allows for comparison of data findings between cases (Yin, 2017).

Archival photography is another tool that used in the study. For interviews, photography produces evidence to support social research (Tinkler, 2013), which make it possible to capture illusive meanings (Glaw, Indian, Kable & Hazelton, 2017). I used archived photos to support the interviews and the results of the study. Other data sources I used included reports, publications, documents, flyers, and any other materials used to support and publicize the adolescents' agency experiences of designing, implementing, and leading community-service initiatives.

### **Definitions**

*Participation:* Participation is a basic citizenship right and is a decision-making process that affects the lives of people and the communities in which they live. It is the way to build democracy and a standard for the measurement of democracies (Hart, 1992).

*Agency:* Agency is associated with hope, empowerment, initiative, self-determination, and efficacy and is a fundamental element in any social change effort as agency is the sense that an individual can change something about themselves or their environment for a valued purpose (Sharp, 2014).

*Empowerment:* Empowerment involves processes that contribute to enabling individuals to effectively contribute to community change efforts (Zimmerman, 2000).

The empowerment outcomes are described as (a) intrapersonal, (b) interactional, and (c) behavioral (Zimmerman, 1995).

*Empowerment intrapersonal component:* Represents beliefs on one's confidence and control to make a change, including leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, and self-esteem (Zimmerman, 1995).

*Empowerment interactional component:* Represents critical awareness of settings that form an individual's life and understanding of actions and resources needed to produce solutions that align with the individual's goals, including adult mentorship, adult resources, and resource mobilization (Zimmerman, 1995).

*Empowerment behavioral component:* Includes efforts individuals make to achieve desired community change, including leadership behavior, community engagement, and school engagement (Zimmerman, 1995).

### **Assumptions**

There were four assumptions for my study. First, I assumed that the participating young people had their agency experiences in leading community-service initiatives as part of the youth program during the first year of war in Yemen (i.e., 2015). Second, I assumed that these participating young people led their community service initiatives when they were between 13 and 17 years old. Third, although those young people were trained by the youth program to design and lead community-service initiatives, they designed, implemented, and led their own community-service initiatives without any influence from adults (i.e., trainers, coordinators, or any supporters). Finally, I assumed that the participating young people recalled their experiences in leading community-

service initiatives and could provide in-depth details on how they were before, during, and after the child agency experience. Additionally, I assumed the participants answered interview questions with honesty, integrity, and clarity.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this multiple-case study was limited to adult participants who were adolescents when they had their agency experience. Moreover, these participants designed and led their community-service initiatives during the war in Yemen, which started in March 2015. In qualitative research, what is important is the in-depth analysis of the research phenomenon, which can be achieved with a small sample (Burkholder et al., 2016; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Consequently, purposive sampling was beneficial because it was possible for me to concentrate on a small number of participants to gather in-depth information to understand the adolescents' child agency experiences.

Because the sample was purposive, I needed to establish a set of criteria for the selection of research participants and to explain a strategy to verify that the participants meet this set of criteria (Burkholder et al., 2016) to establish profound selection criteria to prevent self-interest or biases (Reddy, 2015). The criteria for selecting my purposeful sampling was young people who (a) took part in the youth program; (b) were enrolled in the program during the war that started in March 2015; (c) were aged between 13 and 17 years when they designed, implemented, and led their community service initiatives; and (d) completed all the requirements of the child agency experience (i.e., designing, implementing, and leading community-service initiatives).



My study was delimited in two ways. First, it was delimited to the young people who participated in designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives as part of the youth program run by a Yemeni NGO. Second, I targeted the young people who were enrolled in the program in 2015 when they were adolescents aged between 13 and 17 years. Because the participants were adult at the time of the study, there was no need for parental consent. Furthermore, the duration between when they implemented and led their community-service initiatives (2015) and now (2020) gave me the chance to explore any changes happened to the development of the young people after the community service initiative experience.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation is that the sample is specific to those who took part in designing and leading community-service initiatives as part of the youth program run by a Yemeni nongovernmental organization. It was the only program I found that gives a space for adolescents to have meaningful child agency experience with minimal adults' intervention and support through designing, implementing, and leading their own community service initiatives. The second limitation was the security situation in Yemen, which hindered my travel to the country to conduct the interviews in person. Furthermore, the participating young people were from different cities spread across Yemen, which made a face-to-face interview challenging as well. Therefore, virtual interviews were an alternative for those who lived in cities that I could not travel to and in case I could not make it to Yemen.

The third limitation was that I could not find academic articles or government reports on child participation in Yemen. Most of the resources that I found on child participation in Yemen were as outdated as 2004 and 2011. I, therefore, depended on reports produced by Save the Children and the International Bureau for Children's Rights (2011), shadow reports submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2004) and a report on child-rearing practices in Yemen by a Yemeni National NGO (2004).

The fourth limitation was the fact that I am one of the founders of the youth program, run by a Yemeni National nongovernmental organization (NGO) in 2008 when I was working for the same NGO. However, this did not impact the selection of participants as I have not involved with the youth program since 2014. I targeted the young people who were enrolled in the youth program in 2015 because I did not contribute to enrollment, training, or support to the adolescent group of this group. I met them for the first time in the interviews.

I applied reflexivity at all stages of my study by consistently assessing my positionality and subjectivity to minimize biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also planned to use dialogic engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) through which I planned to have a colleague cofacilitate the interviews, assist with transcription, and verify the interpretation of analyzed data. Documenting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and recording (Saldaña, 2016) were also effective measures to lessen biases. More details on my role as a researcher and measures to minimize biases are in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

Social researchers' focus needs to be on social change and betterment of human conditions (Kelman, 1968). Also, policy is key when it comes to social change, and can be equivalent to logical problem solving (Kelman, 1968). Both analysis and logical problem solving are key in promoting humane and constructive social change (Kelman, 1968). This study contributed to the knowledge and practice of child participation, agency, and empowerment. Through my literature review of articles and reports on the past 5 years (i.e., 2013 through 2019), I found no articles on child participation in emergencies, conflicts, and wars. Therefore, the findings of the study might contribute to the knowledge and literature of child participation. Further, I did not find scholarly resources on child participation in Yemen to support my literature review. This study might fill the gap of the lack of scientific research on child participation in Yemen and serve as a basis for future related studies.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of adolescents in designing and leading community-service initiatives. The findings of the study might inform the practices of the youth program in specific and the child participation in general. The adolescents' experiences of designing and leading community-service initiatives might be an effective model to support other young people who are sharing similar contexts. Moreover, the study might result in a model based on the youth program, which can be used in other emergency contexts to support and build the capacity of adolescents living in conflict areas.

For influencing social policy, scientific research is needed to provide credible evidence on the need for social change (Kelman, 1968). The results of the study could be used for an evidence-based advocacy to make these empowerment opportunities accessible for other young people in the same or other communities. The findings might inform the practices of children's rights activists and advocates in their efforts in policy change and educating the public in Yemen. Moreover, the study results and recommendations might inform analysis, planning, and programming of the governmental and non-governmental organizations as well international organizations and funding agencies working for and with children and young people in Yemen for more effective and evidence-based programming. The significance of this study laid on the fact that I was trying to study an under-researched phenomenon in the context of war. The generated knowledge could serve as an educational and enlightening resource for enhancing children's situations and for educating communities.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 is introducing my study. I summarized the highlights of my literature review in the background section, including a brief on child participation and how most researchers suggested that child participation leads to empowerment. I also discussed how some studies discussed the interrelationship between child protection and child participation with a brief description of gaps in the literature. I then explained the research problem, which is around the vulnerability of children in Yemen, and how child participation is relevant in these cases.

The research problem led to my research purpose and question on the exploration of the experiences of adolescents in designing, implementing, and leading community-service initiatives. I described empowerment theory as my theoretical framework and how it aligned with the purpose of my research in studying the child agency experience of adolescents. Further, I described the nature, the methodology, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, as well as the significance of my study. In Chapter 2, I provide analysis on my review to the literature of child participation and agency.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Children's participation is one of the four main principles of the UNCRC, which emphasizes that children have the right to express their views, to be taken seriously, and to participate and make decisions on matters affecting them (Nolas, 2015; United Nations, 1989). As one of the four guiding principles, the right to participate is a fundamental requirement for any other right to be realized (Theis, 2004; UNICEF, 2014). However, even though children's right to participation is a guiding principle, many researchers have found that it is still tokenistic in many societies around the world because children are not allowed to convey their opinion and are expected to obey their parents and elders who are deemed to know the best (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017) .

Adults limit the participation of children based on the concepts of voice and competence (Horgan, Forde, Martin, & Parkes, 2017). For instance, in Križ and Skivenes's (2017) study in which they explored how child welfare employees in England, Norway, and the United States perceive child participation, the authors found that in all three countries, child welfare workers perceived the participation of children as the hearing of their opinions and information gathering. Participation is described as generally taking part in activity and participating in making decisions (Thomas, 2007). Participation of children can take different forms, for instance through committees, forums, councils, and decision-making processes (Larkins, 2014). The children also act as citizens by contributing to the social good and achieve their own personal rights (Larkins, 2014).

In this chapter, I discuss recent studies in the field of child participation. I organized this literature review to first discuss the theoretical framework of child participation with a justification for selecting empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995) as a theoretical framework, followed by an overview of the general situation in Yemen and child participation in that country in particular. I then present an analysis of the literature about child participation in social change and community development in which children function as researchers, leaders in community-service projects and initiatives, and as peer and community educators. Next, I discuss some studies that addressed child participation in the context of child protection. I end the literature review with a discussion of the challenges and constraints to child participation as reflected in recent studies. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the literature review and how the identified gaps are related to my study topic, and how this indicated the use of the research methodology.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The databases in the Walden University Library that I used for the literature search included Education Source, Social Work Abstracts, SocINDEX with Full Text, Child Trends, ERIC, ProQuest Central, and SAGE Journals (formerly SAGE Premier). Search words included *child participation, children's participation, child agency, children and young people participation or agency, children's initiatives, child-led initiatives, young people-led initiatives, children and young people empowerment, social change OR social change agents, children agency OR change agents, empowerment theory, and children or young people or teens or adolescents.*

The reference lists of the most recent articles included relevant and recent articles that helped with this review. Moreover, when I accessed an article in the databases, the databases suggested other articles with similar or related topics. I included most of these articles in the review as well. Most of the articles I used in the literature review were current and published within the last 5 years (i.e., 2013-2019). However, in the literature search, I could not find articles about child participation in Yemen. The only resources I found were reports by international organizations, such as Save the Children (2011) and the International Bureau of Children's Rights (2011), as well as some local organizations, such as SOUL for Development (2004) and Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (2005).

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Child participation theories and models are diverse and contribute much to the understanding of child participation in a variety of contexts. Hart's (1992) "ladder of children's participation," adopted from Arnstein's (1969) model, is considered one of the most influential models in this field. This model classifies possible manners of adult-child interactions represented in participatory practices in a hierarchal order (Hart, 1992). Hart's children's participation ladder consists of eight rungs climbing from the *non-participation rungs* (manipulation, decoration, and tokenism), through the *middle levels* (assigned but informed, consulted and informed), to the *highest rungs* (adult-initiated; shared decisions with children; child-initiated and directed) and at the *top* (child-initiated, shared decisions with adults).



Although Hart's (1992) ladder of participation model is widely used by researchers, I did not see it as the best theoretical foundation for my research because Hart's model focuses on the level of participation and relationship between children and adults. I am exploring the constructs and outcomes of children's experiences when they design and lead community-service initiatives and function as social change agents regardless of what level of participation these experiences are and the relationships with adults. Therefore, I used Zimmerman's (1995; 2000) empowerment theory as my conceptual framework.

Empowerment theory involves processes that contribute to enabling individuals to effectively be active in community change efforts (Zimmerman, 2000). In empowering processes, the opportunities to elevate confidence and skills, exercising control, learning and practicing competences, and making decisions are key (Zimmerman, 2000; 2011). For adolescents, such processes may be achieved through working in a friendly and caring environment, contributing effectively to community, and interacting with positive and constructive adults (Zimmerman, 2011).

To understand the processes and outcomes of actions to exercise power and control, empowerment can be both a value orientation and theoretical model (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). As a value orientation, empowerment suggests that community members have active roles in contributing to social change, not only at the project implementation stage but also at the agenda-setting stage (Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment theory posits that structures, actions, and activities can be empowering with varying processes and outcomes, depending on the contexts and people being

empowered (Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment takes diverse shapes for different people in different settings (Zimmerman, 2000). According to Zimmerman (2000), a key element in empowerment theory distinguishing between the *empowering processes* and *empowered outcomes*.

Empowering processes are the efforts to obtain control and resources, as well as the understanding of the social environment (Zimmerman, 2000). These can be considered empowering processes only if they help people gain skills that enable them to solve problems and make decisions (Zimmerman, 2000, p.46). Examples of empowering processes for individuals include managing resources, working with others, and learning decision-making skills (Zimmerman, 2000). The empowered outcomes can be participatory behavior, critical awareness, and sense of control, which are the consequences of the empowering processes (Zimmerman, 2000).

The focus of empowerment theory is the empowerment outcomes (see Figure 1), which Zimmerman (1995) described as (a) intrapersonal, (b) interactional, and (c) behavioral. The intrapersonal component represents beliefs on one's confidence and control to make a change (Zimmerman, 1995). The interactional component represents critical awareness of settings that form an individual's life and understanding of actions and resources needed to produce solutions that align with the individual's goals (Zimmerman, 1995). The behavioral component includes efforts individuals make to achieve desired community change (Zimmerman, 1995). It is worth mentioning here that these outcomes are context-specific because different contexts necessitate different beliefs, critical analysis, and actions to realize goals (Zimmerman, 1995).

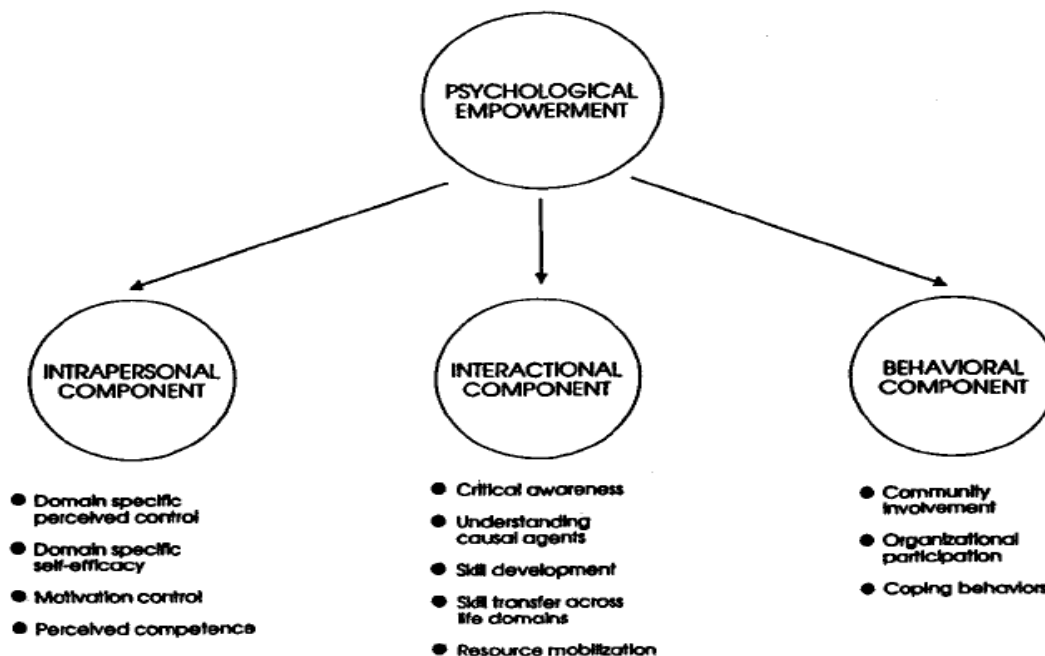


Figure 2. Nomological network for psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 588).

Empowerment theory has been used in different studies targeting both adults and young people (Zimmerman et al., 2018). In their study, Zimmerman et al. (2018) provided an analysis of how some researchers and practitioners used empowerment theory for their work or studies. Programs that used the empowerment theory include those for the prevention of HIV and AIDS among Mexican men, substance and alcohol use by young people, and youth violence (Zimmerman et al., 2018). Youth programs that are based on empowerment have had a focus on creating a supportive environment that enables young people to build assets, connect with supporting structures such as resources and supportive adults, and take part in community change actions (Zimmerman, 1995; 2000). I searched different databases for previous studies that used Zimmerman's empowerment theory but could not find any studies except for

Zimmerman's recent studies with other researchers. Therefore, I focused on Zimmerman et al.'s (2018) analysis on similar programs that used the empowerment theory partially in their recent study on evaluating an after-school program to engage middle school students in community change.

Zimmerman et al. (2018) argued that many youth-centered programs and interventions use the term '*empowerment*'; however, they do not apply an empowerment-based theoretical framework explicitly to guide the content of the intervention. Some programs have aspects of the empowerment theory; however, none has incorporated the three components (intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral) into one program that also examined its direct impact on youth outcomes and the young people's enhanced sense of empowerment (Zimmerman et al., 2018). Two examples provided by Zimmerman et al. (2018) are the Youth Action Research for Prevention intervention (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009) and the Teen Empowerment Program (Pearrow, 2008). The empowerment theory informed these two programs; however, these programs did not mention explicitly the three components of empowerment theory (intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral) or reflect on the crucial interdependence between the components to improve the empowered outcomes (Zimmerman et al., 2018).

To conclude, Zimmerman (1995) described the three components of the empowerment theory as they "merge to form a picture of a person who believes that he or she has the capability to influence a given context (intrapersonal component) understands how the system works in that context (interactional component), and engages in behaviors to exert control in the context (behavioral component)" (p. 590).

I used the three components as established by Zimmerman (1995) and detailed in Zimmerman et al. (2018) to guide my study. The three components consist of the intrapersonal component (leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, self-esteem), interactional component (adult mentorship, adult resources, resource mobilization), and behavioral component (leadership behavior, community engagement, school engagement). The objectives of the Youth for Solution Program in Zimmerman et al.'s (2018) study are similar to those of the youth program in which my participants were enrolled; therefore, empowerment theory was a relevant theoretical framework for my study, too. Although I used these concepts and components of empowerment theory to guide my research, I did not discuss the content of the youth program because the purpose of my study was not to evaluate the program but rather to explore the experiences of adolescents in designing, leading, and implementing community service initiatives as part of the youth program. In this section, I provide an analysis of the child participation literature that reflects on findings and outcomes of empirical studies, reviews, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and international stances toward child participation.

### **Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the first and most widely ratified convention demonstrating and discussing children rights (United Nations, 1989). In the UNCRC, child participation is a *right* in itself and a means by which other rights can be realized (UNICEF, 2014). Article 12 of the UNCRC emphasizes that children have the right to express their views, be taken seriously, and participate and make decisions on matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989). The Committee on the

Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2009) also issued its General Comment no. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard.

The general objective of the General Comment is to promote the effectual execution of Article 12 of the Convention by States Parties; to enforce knowledge and understanding of the significance of Article 12 and its consequences to governments, shareholders, NGOs, and society as a whole; and to enhance the scope of the laws, the policies and the practices needed for full execution of Article 12 (United Nation, 2009). In its General Comment no. 12 (United Nations, 2009), the Committee also aimed to emphasize the positive strategies in the implementation of Article 12, drawing on the Committee's monitoring experience, and propose fundamental criteria to adequately weigh up child opinions on all issues affecting them.

Hart (1992) defined *child participation* as the “[p]rocess of sharing decisions which affects one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built, and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured; .... Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship” (p. 5). Adults play a key role in supporting young people to grow critical and creative citizens, who can contribute to their development and the progress of democratic communities (Burger, 2019; Percy-Smith, & Burns, 2013). Child participation empowers children and increases their agency (Sharp, 2014).

Agency is a fundamental element in any social change effort. As described by Sharp (2014), “Agency is a feeling that someone has the ability to change something about themselves or their environment (for a valued goal) ...” (p.348). Agency is linked

to hope, self-determination, empowerment, initiative, self-efficacy, and other factors (Sharp, 2014), which are all required for self-development as well as community development at large (Percy-Smith, & Burns, 2013). Participation enables children to respect differences and strengthen their capacity to resolve disputes in a peaceful manner (Lansdown et al., 2014). Children can challenge discriminatory, threatening, and abusive situations by participatory efforts (Lansdown et al., 2014).

### **Yemen Situation Overview**

The Republic of Yemen is located in the south of the Arabian Peninsula in the southwest of Asia (Yemeni Government Portal., n.d.). It is bordered to the north by Saudi Arabia, to the south by the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, to the east by Oman and from the west by the Red Sea (Yemeni Government Portal., n.d.). According to the most recent demographic statistic estimates of 2018 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019), the population of Yemen is 28,667,230; 39.16% are children aged zero to 14 years and 21.26% are young people aged 15 to 24 years. The literacy rate, people aged 15 years and older who can read and write (2015 estimate), is 70.1% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019).

Since March 2015, Yemen has been in a state of war, which has been called by the United Nations the worst humanitarian crisis in the world (World Bank, 2019). The constant conflict led to a destroyed economy and infrastructure as well as food insecurity (World Bank, 2019). Moreover, Yemen is facing the spread of preventable epidemics, such as cholera, measles, diphtheria, and dengue fever (World Bank, 2019). Due to the ongoing war in Yemen, the vulnerability of children is growing (UNICEF 2019). The

marriage rates for children are estimated to have tripled between 2017 and 2018, and the recruitment of children in armed groups is increasing (UNICEF 2019). Moreover, extreme forms of child labor continue to grow (UNICEF 2019).

In 2017, 842 children in Yemen were hired to take part in armed conflicts (UNGASC, 2018). Although most of the children were between 15 and 17 years of age, some were younger than 11 (UNGASC, 2018). In Yemen, children are also working in a range of labor forms, including fishing, begging and domestic work (USDOL, 2017). In the present armed conflict, children are also used to guard checkpoints, patrol, and operate in the fields of war to supply food and water (UGASC, 2018). Such abusive and harmful practices adversely affect the well-being and development of children (Lansdown et al., 2014). The view of adults that children are passive objects leads to ignoring their right to participation, thereby reducing their resilience and agency (Smith, 2016). Child participation plays a vital role in child protection because participation can improve children's social skills, aspiration, self-esteem, and confidence.

### **Child Participation in Yemen**

I did not find academic articles nor government reports on child participation in Yemen. The available resources I found on child participation in Yemen were outdated. For the child participation overview in Yemen, I relied on reports produced by, for example, Save the Children and the International Bureau for Children's Rights (2011); shadow reports submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2004); and a report on child-rearing practices in Yemen by a Yemeni National NGO (2004).



The Yemeni word for child, *jahel*, meaning “unaware” or “ignorant,” might reflect the community’s perception toward children. This attitude has amplified the denial of basic children’s rights of thinking, participating, and making decisions of their own, or even learning from their own mistakes, let alone their participation in issues related to them (SOUL for Development, 2004). The way adults perceive and deal with children has led to children growing up lacking basic personal as well as life-skills, and lacking independent personality, and repeating the same rearing practices they experienced with their own children (SOUL for Development, 2004). According to the third Shadow Report (2005), the Yemeni Personal Status Law dealt with children as ‘citizens of the third degree’ because it classified them as ‘blind followers to their families.’

In addition, the 3rd NGOs Report of 2004 referred to the social norms and traditions that were based on *parental and adult authority*, and that they do not perceive that children have a right to exercising influence over their situation in the family, school or society (Save the Children, 2011). In terms of understanding, awareness, and decision-making, children are considered minors, although they are completely liable for their criminal behavior (Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights, 2005). Children should obey adults' orders, and their views are not taken into account (Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights, 2005). Another obstacle in the way of obtaining this right is the educational system, which incorporates no infrastructure to promote the child’s right to participation and free expression of views (Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights, 2005).

In the State report "Towards a World Fit for Children," children and young people clearly expressed their thoughts and illustrated their vision on the different aspects of

how to introduce change in their lives and their country, as well as on their role in making a change. They urged to be given the right, the skills and adults' acceptance for an efficient contribution in issues related to children and their development. One of children argued, "young people may be much better able to help their country than adults. But you have to give us the chance" (Government of Yemen, 2006, p. 12).

Although Yemen has an explicit article (No. 7) in its Child Act No. 45 of 2002 on child participation, which states that children have the right to express their views freely and mirrors Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children participation in Yemen is still tokenistic (Save the Children, 2011). In its Concluding Observations on the fourth periodic report of Yemen (UNCRC, 2014), the Committee on the Right of the Child expressed its concerns that children in Yemen are not perceived as right holders. The Committee also expressed its concern about the lack of opportunities for children to have their voices heard in decision-making processes at the policy-making level as well as in the family, school, and community at large.

The committee also urged the Government of Yemen to ensure meaningful mandate and that adequate technical, financial, and human resources are provided to the Children's Parliament for more effective engagement. In addition, the Committee commended the Government of Yemen to support programming and awareness raising interventions to promote children's meaningful participation within the family, school, and community. The Committee referred to its general comment No. 12 in its recommendation to the Government of Yemen in issues related to child participation in their fourth periodic report.

Although these reports indicated a challenging situation of child participation in Yemen, there have been some initiatives that support child engagement in meaningful participation programs. Examples of these programs include the youth consultative council, the Ministry of Education Student Councils in schools, UNICEF peer educators conveying key messages in health, education, etc.; the children School Health Committees by WHO, and most importantly Yemen's Children's Parliament (Save the Children, 2011). Children's Parliament was established in 2000 and has had six elections since its establishment. Elected children are from diverse backgrounds from across the country (Defense for Children International, 2012). The Committee shared a positive comment that the election of children's Parliament took place but shared a concern that child participation in the children's Parliament needs to be supported with all necessary resources to be more meaningful. In the following pages of this chapter, I discuss the roles that children can play as social agents as well as the various stances and views on child participation.

### **Child Participation in Social Change and Community Development**

The findings of most of the studies I reviewed confirmed that children are competent active citizens who are able to contribute to social change (Bahou, 2012; Johnson, 2017; Lansdown et al., 2014; Nolas, 2015; Smith, 2016; Vanner, 2014; Zimmerman, et al. 2018). Child participation has taken different forms, such as taking part in research, peer and community education, and leading community-service initiatives. An analysis of the results of related studies, similarities, and differences in children as peer and community educators and researchers is illustrated in this section. A

review of studies that tackle children as leaders of community-service initiatives is under the child empowerment programs and initiatives below.

### **Children as Researchers**

There are four approaches in which children participate in or contribute to research in the care system but can be relevant in other contexts as described by Dixon et al. (2019). These are participation, consultation, peer research, and co-production (Dixon et al., 2019). Participation refers to children as research participants in which they respond to surveys or participate in interviews or focus group discussions (Dixon et al., 2019). Consultation can take similar forms like participation, but children are not respondents but rather consultants who provide informed views on the topic being studied or the research participants (Dixon et al., 2019). Finally, peer research enables members of the research participants to take on the role of researchers; whereas, co-production deals with children and young people as partners with adults in both research and service.

As researchers, children work to collect information about critical issues in school or the community and advocate for solutions (Anyon et al., 2018). Positive transformations in the lives of children and young people, as well as their contexts, can occur when they participate in participatory action research, which includes moving towards cultures with respect to one another in intergenerational relations (Johnson, 2017). There were several empowerment outcomes among the young people who engaged in participatory action research, such as critical thinking and communication skills, problem-solving, and teamwork (Bradbury-Jones, Isham, & Taylor, 2018; Ozer & Douglas, 2013). Children's contribution as researchers can help make decision-makers

hear their voices and value their evidence as part of a transformational development process when shaping policies and services for children and young people (Johnson, 2017).

A common type of research led by children is the youth-led participatory action research (YPAR), in which children have a leading role in the different components of the research along with adults (Anyon et al., 2018). YPAR is a strategy that engages both children and adults and can contribute to the increase of power-sharing between adults and children and supports children's self-determination (Anyon et al., 2018). YPAR may be a potential approach to increase leadership opportunities for young people of color, who are low-income, and enhancing the relationship between adults and children in community-based programming (Anyon et al., 2018; Chou et al., 2015; & Johnson, 2017). The young people's experience in research did not empower them only but also enabled them to advocate for their peers by disseminating the findings and recommendations of their study (Chou et al., 2015).

Moving children from being researched to being researchers helped in activating their social agency and making their voices heard (Bahou, 2012). Some changes, which are resultant of participatory action research, include increasing interest and self-confidence among children and young people to participate in action research and changing employees' attitudes toward the importance of children's standpoints (Johnson, 2017). Other changes include getting local interventions and projects informed and changed by the evidence produced by children and having opportunities for dialogue with children and young people and shifting of Dynamics of power (Johnson, 2017). These

changes and benefits were some of the highlights of most of the youth participatory action research, whose focus was studying the impact of children's experiences on children themselves as well as their communities.

A study that did not focus on the impact of youth participatory action research on children but rather had an argument about the level of participation and the quality of research produced is Kim's study (2016). What made Kim's (2016) study different from other studies such as Chou et al.'s (2015), Bahou's (2012), and Johnson's (2017) studies is that Kim (2016) tackled the issue of children's competency to conduct research as well as adults' involvement in YPAR rather than the focus on the empowerment advantages that children obtain because of their participation in research. Kim (2016) argued that although research led by children may seem to overcome the defects of having 'adults' agendas' in the participatory experiences by children, it does not avert such dilemmas entirely. Child-led research is generally conducted within the framework of the adult decision to facilitate this research, with their agendas and views, which implies that what children do is often within a pre-defined and restricted context (Kim, 2016).

Research experience by children happens in a setting where adults make the decision to facilitate it, which means these participation experiences take place within the overarching agendas (Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) also discussed the quality of research produced by children, citing Dyson and Meagher (2001) who suggested that the more the child participates in the research, the less likely the research meets the research essential quality standards because of the child's limited capacity and skills in conducting research. However, Kim (2016) stated that the quality issues are less significant if the

research value is evaluated by whether or how it contributed to the empowerment of those who produced it rather than its quality.

Child and youth participation in research could be more meaningful rather than tokenistic (Johnson, 2017). When children and young people take part in meaningful participatory action research, there can be positive transformational changes to the lives of children and young people and, in turn, changes to their communities (Johnson, 2017). For this to happen, adults need to treat children and young people as agents of change in participatory democracy in a broader cultural and political setting (Johnson, 2017). Building dialogue and trust and establishing a participatory environment are important prerequisites for child and youth-centered transformational change (Chou et al., 2015).

### **Children as Peer and Community Educators**

In some communities, learning is not collaborative and is not seen as a two-way system in education but rather a one-way system with adults as educators and children as students (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). However, there is an important collection of evidence that recognizes the value of peer-to-peer study (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). Child-to-child, for example, is a health promotion strategy in societies that actively includes young individuals in their promotion of good health practices. As illustrated by Percy-Smith and Burns (2013), child-to-child is a six-step method that brings together study planning, intervention, and assessment through one strategy between young people and the community. As peer educators, young people play a leading role in stimulating the spread of learning and action among other young individuals (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). As peer educators, young individuals do not contribute to research or take direct

actions; it is more about constructing the capacity of society by empowering other peers (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013).

An example of peer education and support is Let's erase the stigma program [LETS] (Murman et al., 2014). The key structure of LETS is that young people hold weekly discussion clubs with club advisors (typically high school teachers) that encourage peer-to-peer communication, discussion and community intervention aimed at reducing stigma (Murman et al., 2014). In short, while traditional anti-stigma youth programs are short, knowledge-driven and generally adult-driven, LETS offers ongoing dialog in an interactive, young people-led format in order to educate participants with attitudes that reduce stigma and increase awareness of mental health (Murman et al., 2014).

Murman et al.'s (2014) findings indicated that it is possible to prevent adverse attitudes that would otherwise be deeply rooted in adulthood and that the easily started, youth-led club development can offer a platform for such preventive attempts. However, Murman et al. (2014) also indicated that this claim needs to be supported by more robust and definitive clinical trials. Another example of the impact of peer education is the outcomes of Marsh, Iosua, McGee, and White's (2017) study in which they examined the extent to which young people act as "change agents" to discourage their peers from smoking. The findings emphasized the beneficial influence that young people can have on their peers' discouragement of smoking (Louise Marsh et al., 2017) .

Children can also be community educators (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). When considering the possible roles for young people in a broader sustainable community



education and development process, adults also recognize the potential role of young people as educators and learners in the community (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). In answer to the question of how young people could play a greater role, a teacher suggested that adults can enable young people to share what they have learned, model good practice, and lead community education outside the school projects and community learning initiatives (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013).

The exchange of values and views in dialogue is a strong learning chance and can simultaneously contribute towards a sense of community solidarity, collective efficiency, mutual appreciation, and respect (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013). This, in turn, can assist build up social capital and build a foundation for the comprehension and trust that will assist to develop the role of young people as active members in the society (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013). These examples show how engaging children and young people in educating their peers and community can be an empowering approach to enable children to become active citizens.

### **Children's Empowerment Programs and Initiatives**

In this section, I discuss the findings of the youth empowering studies with a focus on the individual programs as they are similar to the youth empowerment program I studied. Most of the findings of the child empowerment studies I reviewed substantiated that child participation experiences enhance children's positive development. For example, Torres-Harding, Baber, Hilvers, Hobbs, and Maly (2018) found that elementary school children who participated in *social activism projects* in the classroom had the ability to develop awareness and knowledge on the sociopolitical contexts of social

problems in their surroundings. As a result of their participation in these activism projects, the participating children were able to take actions that positively impacted them and their community (Torres-Harding et al., 2018). These projects have the potential to foster self-efficacy, civic engagement, and positive youth development (Torres-Harding et al., 2018).

Participating in these activism projects facilitated a sense of community, social connectedness, and empowerment among the participating children (Torres-Harding et al., 2018). These results are similar to the findings of Zimmerman et al., (2018). Zimmerman et al. (2018) tested the hypothesis that the *Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES)*, a program that aims at empowering middle school students, would support adolescents to increase positive developmental outcomes, and decrease undesired behaviors. Zimmerman et al. (2018) demonstrated that those who were more involved in the YES program reported empowerment with more prosocial outcomes and less antisocial outcomes than those who were less involved. The children's experience in the YES program helped them gain confidence and take up leadership roles, in which they contributed to their community change alongside with supportive adults (Zimmerman et al., 2018).

Although the participation experiences that children went through in Gersch et al.'s study were different from Zimmerman et al.'s (2018) and Torres-Harding et al.'s (2018) studies, the results are similar. Gersch et al. (2014) discussed a tool they developed called '*A Little Box of Big Questions (LBBQ)*', which consists of four subsections of questions displayed in colorful illustrative cards. These four subsections

are "Identity; Important People; Meaning and Purpose; and Thinking and Planning" (Gersch et al., 2014, p. 32). The LBBQ is used to guide conversations with children as an approach to empower them through listening to them. Gersch et al.'s (2014) article highlighted how children were empowered at each stage of the LBBQ conversations as they shed light on the children's standpoints and perspectives that can reinforce future actions and self-understanding.

Similar to the evaluation of YES program that aims at empowering vulnerable children by Zimmerman et al. (2018), Goossens, Onrust, Monshouwer, and Orobio de Castro (2016) evaluated the POWER program that aims at empowering the second generation migrant adolescents in The Netherlands. Although Zimmerman et al. (2018) asserted that children who engaged in the YES program were empowered with positive outcomes, Goossens et al. (2016) were less assertive, stating that when POWER is implemented with high fidelity, it might contribute to decreasing the participating adolescents' risk of social marginalization. At the end of their article, Goossens et al. (2016) raised a question of under what circumstances these outcomes can be achieved and concluded by stating that the intervention implementation process can substantially influence the outcomes.

Another example of a young people's empowerment program in which children function as peer educators is the LETS program (Murman et al., 2014). The LETS program provides a conceptual framework for young people that blends the personal discussions and disclosures with concepts and action plans for young people to counter the stigma of mental illness. LETS offers ongoing dialog in an interactive, young people-

led format in order to educate participants with attitudes that reduce stigma and increase awareness of mental health (Murman et al., 2014).

### **Conclusion on Child Participation in Social Change and Community Development**

Researchers suggest that child participation leads to empowerment (Anyon et al., 2018; Gersch et al., 2014; Johnson, 2017; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Rivera & Santos, 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2018). Additionally, child participation can help children challenge maltreatment and abuse, as participation can help children acquire competences, extend aspiration, enhance self-esteem and confidence (Lansdown et al., 2014; Percy-Smith, & Burns, 2013). Through child participation experiences, children benefit by acquiring new skills to take responsibility and contribute to positive change (Crowley, 2015). These articles emphasized the importance of child participation and how beneficial it is for the children themselves as well as the community at large (Lansdown et al., 2014; Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2018). However, there might be concerns and challenges when applying child participation in protection contexts.

### **Child Participation Vs. Child Protection**

Although these studies highlighted the importance of child participation to empower children, there are other studies that reflect on the challenges when applying child participation in the context of child protection. UNICEF refers to child protection as: "preventing and responding to violence, exploitation, and abuse against children – including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labor and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage" (UNICEF, 2006, p. 1). Collins (2017) noted that child engagement presented a significant challenge in

practice in protection contexts. Reasons leading to this challenge may include age discrimination, denial of opportunities, and child participation efforts that are immaterial and tokenistic (Collins, 2017).

There is international support to child participation, but this support is rhetoric and not well practiced in international protection efforts (Collins, 2017; Houghton, 2015; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017). In international child protection, the interrelationship between the child rights to protection and participation continues to be underappreciated and not well practiced (Collins, 2017). As emphasized by Houghton's (2015) study, there is a need to deal with children as agents in their own protection as well as social and political change agents. In order to incorporate child agency, Houghton (2015) adapted Mullender, Hague, Imam, and Kelly's (2002) mnemonic of three Cs (*consent, confidentiality and child protection*) and three Ds (*danger, distress, and disclosure*). To enclose children's power and impact, Houghton also contributed the three Es (*enjoyment, empowerment, and emancipation*) to Mullender et al.'s (2002) model.

Meaningful and effective participation and engagement of children and young people are key to enhance child protection (Ruiz et al., 2017). The social work system is an example of child protection context that requires child participation. McCafferty (2017), for example, argued that children need to be more empowered to be engaged in making decisions in issues affecting them in the child protection social work system. Moreover, organizations need to reconstruct how they perceive children as vulnerable, negligent, and in need for protection; and social workers need to be "less protectionist

and more empowering" with confidence that engaging children is a positive opportunity for development and autonomy (McCafferty, 2017).

Another example that requires ensuring protection over participation is engaging children in participatory religious activities. As argued by Segura-April (2016), there needs to be guidelines to support children participation to avoid child manipulation and to ensure child safety in the church context, especially when functioning as agents of mission. Segura-April (2016) raised questions that need to be considered when engaging children with church activities, such as how can churches empower children-at-risk and at the same time protect them from exploitation, manipulation, and spiritual abuse, and what is the appropriate participation? Examples of guidelines and principles that the church should consider to protect children who participate as agents of mission that Segura-April (2016) suggested include ensuring that child participation is the child's right and the adult's responsibility, ensuring that it contributes to the achievement of other rights, is voluntary and relevant to the daily life of children, and sustainable (Segura-April, 2016).

To address the criticism of child participation activities because children are perceived as vulnerable and in need of adults' protection, *coproduction* can theoretically and practically take on the advantages of social accountability and vulnerability (Tisdall, 2017). Coproduction can allow for particular resources and support sharing with children by adults, who recognize children's and young people's competencies, expertise, and assets (Tisdall, 2017). With supporting structures, coproduction examples showed that children could be part of collective decision making with adults in children protection

settings (Tisdall, 2017). Power resides inside everyone; it is more about practicing this power; therefore, children need to be viewed as powerful agents able to exercise influence (Bradbury-Jones, Isham, and Taylor, 2018).

To conclude this section, child participation is related to child protection, and with empowerment, children can take more effective roles in matters affecting them (Lansdown et al., 2014). The child right perspective is that children are people with agency, entitled to dignity and protection from inhumanity and injustice (Smith, 2016). However, child participation and child protection practice is challenging. Although it sounds contradictory, a child is an agent and vulnerable at the same time (Collins, 2017). Notwithstanding the challenges, child participation is required in child protection initiatives (Collins, 2017; Houghton, 2015; McCafferty, 2017; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017; Tisdall, 2017). This concludes that child participation is beneficial but also has some challenges that need to be addressed.

### **Challenges to Child Participation**

**Constrains to Child Participation.** Internationally, children have, customarily, been deprived of the right to protection from injustice, abuse, and violence as well as the measures through which they can challenge these harms (Lansdown et al., 2014). Considered powerless to protect themselves, these abuse experiences and harmful practices often negatively impact the children's wellbeing and development (Lansdown et al., 2014). Adults typically see children as vulnerable and in need of protection, which makes them passive objects of adults' decisions (Smith, 2016). The perception of seeing children as passive objects makes their participation and privacy rights ignored, leading

to decreasing their resiliency and agency (Smith, 2016). In addition, there is limited awareness and understanding of participation as a right (Forde, Horgan, Martin, & Parkes, 2017; Vanner, 2014), and the realization of child rights to participation remains hard to achieve in practice (Collins, 2017; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017; Houghton, 2015).

Percy-Smith and Burns (2013) listed three challenges that hinder children from taking on roles of change agents. The first challenge is the extent to which children develop a sense of agency. To develop a sense of agency, young people need to develop a critically-consciousness and a sense of own capacity (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). It is more likely that young people build their own knowledge and space to articulate their own talents and creativity and have the possibility to put ideas and activities into practice, rather than being passive educational consumers (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). In the same stance, Sharp (2014) explored the factors that develop how adolescents see themselves as agents, resulting in a preliminary idea of factors that improved agency and the perception of being an agent. In his findings, Sharp (2014) indicated how the sense of being an agent among adolescents can be supported through positive interpersonal relationships, the structural context, and their views and emotional states.

The second challenge Percy-Smith and Burns (2013) mentioned is the lack of opportunities for children to take action and practice agency. De Winter (1997) argued that it is not enough for young people to simply learn about sustainable development and change opportunities without taking on roles and engaging with community learning and action. Adults need to support young people to grow critical and creative citizens who



can contribute to their development and the progress of democratic communities (Burger, 2019).

The third challenge is adult recognition of children's skills and support in assuming active roles (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). Adult assistance, in turn, needs to challenge restrictive mentalities about what children can do as children, who are sometimes treated as persons who lack competence (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013). This raises another question around the best interest of the child. As illustrated by Ruiz-Casares et al. (2017), determining what the best interest of the child is also an issue as to who should determine their view and how to balance the best interest of the child or young person with the views of his or her parents and what could be culturally regarded as *parental rights*. In many societies worldwide, children have no right to express their opinions and should more likely be obedient to parents who are thought to know better; however, this stance does not mean that parents are against the rights of children (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017).

Dixon et al. (2019) also explained other challenges to child participation. The implementation of participatory methods can be comparatively costly; therefore, it is essential that such activities are precisely costed and properly financed in order to maximize the advantages for all stakeholders, including scientists, professionals, policymakers, and young people (Dixon et al., 2019). It is also essential for the ethical framework to be taken into account to guarantee the protection and safeguarding of those involved (Dixon et al., 2019).

Many obstacles also exist to prevent children from being effectively involved in youth care and protection of children (Rap, Verkroost, & Bruning, 2019). Brady et al. (2019) found some challenges to child participation in their study in which they explored the extent to which children in care can make decisions about their daily life, engage in childcare reviews, obtain information, take advantage of advocacy facilities, and have access to a complaint system. There is evidence showing that children can engage, but there are also opportunities to improve their rights to cover all children in care and in all fields of practice (Brady et al., 2019). In the Netherlands, for example, the involvement of children is better governed and practically enforced in the process of access to mandatory youth care via court orders; however, children's access to information to procedures and their engagement can be improved (Rap et al., 2019). The minimum age limit of twelve years is implemented throughout almost the entire child care process, meaning children below that age have few possibilities to participate (Rap et al., 2019).

Similarly, Ärlemalm-Hagsér and Davis (2014) discussed how children are defined and endorsed in the Australian and Swedish national guidelines for early childhood education as active participants for change. Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis's (2014) analysis showed that while curricula from both Australia and Sweden deal with environmental, social and cognitive content, the political aspects of people development such as children as active citizens and political agents are limited or not at all addressed. In other words, children are not recognized in the early childhood curriculum framework as skilled persons or change agents for sustainability (Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis, 2014). Therefore, these documents lack curricula that support children as equal citizens in

contributing their voices and actions to civic and public participation (Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis, 2014).

**Limited Awareness on Child Participation.** One of the main challenges to child participation is the limited awareness of child participation in different settings (Collins, 2017; Forde et al., 2017; Vanner, 2014). In her study, in which she examined the level and nature of children's participation in Save the Children's school health and nutrition (SHN) project in El Salvador, Vanner (2014) found that children's participation was limited because of the lack of awareness among teachers and students about children's participation as a right. With an understanding of children rights, children's participation can be more meaningful and overt (Vanner, 2014). However, participation was associated with the SHN project methodology, and neither students nor teachers stated that the rights of children are known as a set of legal and moral values to be upheld by the El Salvador government (Vanner, 2014). There needs to be a cultural change in the attitudes of adults towards children and young people; and before that can occur, there needs to be training on participation for adults working with young people, in home, school, and community contexts (Forde et al., 2017).

#### **Literature Disputing the Link Between Participation and Empowerment.**

Although almost all the studies I used in this literature review confirmed that child participation leads to empowerment, there was one study which stated otherwise, arguing that child participation does not lead to empowerment (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). Adu-Gyamfi (2013) argued that there is a conceptual connection between participation and empowerment that is implicit but not adequately studied. The study discussed the

different types of child participation and the concept of power, and concluded that participation does not lead to empowerment (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013).

According to Adu-Gyamfi (2013), the success of any activity in child participation relies mainly on the role of adults who can promote or prevent the participation of children and young people. Therefore, adults need to adapt to accommodate young people to participate effectively in the public sphere (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). Adu-Gyamfi argued that child participation was not inherently empowering since projects that involve children, such as young advocacy or TV broadcasting, young people forums did not enable young individuals to practice different powers for important results in their participatory initiatives.

Adu-Gyamfi (2013) also argued that, even if involvement resulted in greater self-confidence, this does not necessarily result in empowered children. In the relational character of power, children and youth cannot be empowered to gain control or to influence decisions that affect their lives, since they are incapable of deploring any form of authority over adult decision-makers (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). In this respect, the participation of children and youth should be regarded as adults recognizing and creating opportunities for dialog with children and young people (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013).

Another unique discussion about child participation is Hanson's (2016). The questions of child agency emerge in the discourse on the criminal responsibility of the children, in which the assumption of "the higher, the better" is equally prevalent. Agency here does not talk much about free self-choice, but about the ability of a person to react to misconduct (Hanson, 2016). For example, imposing a high minimum age for voting, legal

status, or decision-making in respect of one's education is seen as an obstacle to the recognition of children's fundamental human rights (Hanson, 2016). The prevailing child rights standards, procedures, and discourses tend to take an opposite view with regard to social domains with an adverse meaning (Hanson, 2016). When children get married, work or participate in armed conflict, or commit criminal offenses, dominant claims no longer stress the ability and participation of children but prioritize their protection (Hanson, 2016).

To conclude, literature has shown that there is sufficient theoretical support for the participation of children, but that it is not well practiced in international child protection (Collins, 2017). Challenges such as limited understanding of children and their capacity, limited awareness of child participation as a right, power struggles, and institutional obstacles continue to surface (Collins, 2017; Vanner, 2014).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Child participation rights as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Children identify children as citizens entitled to human rights, rather than passive receivers of the actions of adults (Smith, 2016, Percy-Smith, & Burns, 2013). Participation empowers children to respect differences, reinforce their capacities in peacefully resolving conflicts (Lansdown et al., 2014). Through participation, children can challenge situations of discrimination, threats, and abuse (Lansdown et al., 2014). Most of these studies emphasized the value of child participation in empowering children and young people (Zimmerman et al., 2018; Sharp, 2014; Lansdown et al., 2014; Percy-Smith, & Burns, 2013). Some of these articles illustrated how adults view children as vulnerable,

immature, irresponsible and in need of safeguarding and argued that adults need to be empowering and have trust that changing capacity of children is a good chance for development, self-confidence, and engagement ( Zimmerman et al., 2018; McCafferty, 2017).

Despite the positive arguments and findings of child participation in most of the articles used in this review, there are a couple of articles that presented the difficulties of child participation especially in the contexts of protection (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013; Hanson, 2016). Child agency consists of restrictions and opportunities, whether accepted, negotiated, or resisted (Stoecklin & Fattore, 2018). The gaps in research also were presented in most of these articles, which formed a good basis for my study. An example of gaps is what Rivera and Santos (2016) described. In order to explain how particular contextual assets encourage beneficial interactions and ties between children and parents, friends and their closed society, further study should look at the effect of social engagement on individual strengths (Rivera & Santos, 2016). Additionally, more research is needed to answer the questions raised by Adu-Gyamfi (2013) in his conclusion which included: what does it actually mean to have more self-confidence and what do the children have confidence in doing? What do the children think they can accomplish now that they could not do before they got involved in child participation experiences? I used Adu-Gyamfi's (2013) questions as part of the interview protocol used for data collection.

Although the aforementioned research regarding child participation and child agency illuminates important findings, I did not find research that examined the influence of child agency experiences on children development and resiliency in Yemen.

Moreover, most of the studies I reviewed were conducted on child agency programs that were implemented in non-conflict environments. Given such, further research was warranted that could examine the impact of child agency in emergencies, such as conflicts and wars. Although child agency was proven to be beneficial for the development of both community and children themselves (Zimmerman et al., 2018; Sharp, 2014; Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013), child agency has not been studied in the context of war. Therefore, I aimed at studying child agency among adolescents in Yemen to address this gap by building on the findings of previous child participation research studies. To explore the experience of adolescents who implemented and led community-service initiatives, qualitative method was a relevant approach to help answer my research question through a multiple case study approach. In chapter three, I provide details on the method I used for my study.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the experiences of adolescents who, at ages 13 to 17 in four cities in Yemen, participated in a social agency experience (i.e., implementing and leading community service initiatives designed to contribute to the welfare of their communities as part of the youth program). Although the study's focus was on adolescents' experiences in leading and implementing community-service initiatives, the study participants were youth aged 18 years and older. They shared their agency experiences that took place when they were adolescents.

In this chapter, I explain the research design, qualitative exploratory multiple case study, and the rationale for selecting this design. I also discuss my role in the research and how I addressed any potential biases. I then provide details on the methodology I used, including the participants' selection criteria, instrumentation, recruitment and participation, data collection, data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

With this qualitative exploratory multiple case study, I answered the following research question:

What are the experiences of empowerment and agency in adolescents aged between 13 and 17 of leading community service projects with the goal of contributing to the welfare of their communities in Yemen?



Participation constitutes the basic right of citizenship, which builds democracy and is a standard to measure democracies (Hart, 1992). Child participation empowers children and increases their agency (Sharp, 2014). Agency is a fundamental element in any social change effort as agency is the sense that an individual can change something about themselves or their environment for a valued purpose (Sharp, 2014). Agency is associated with hope, empowerment, initiative, self-determination, and efficacy (Sharp, 2014). Child participation can assist children and young people challenge ill-treatment and abuse, as participation can help them gain skills, expand aspiration, improve self-esteem and confidence (Lansdown et al., 2014; Percy-Smith, & Burns, 2013).

Using a multiple case study design, I explored the experiences of child agency and the empowerment of adolescents during the ongoing war. Yemen has been in conflict since 2015 and continues to be in a status of emergency (UNGASC, 2018). The findings of the study contribute to the knowledge and practice of child participation because there is lack of research on child participation in emergencies.

My philosophical orientation is constructivist because I believe inquiry cannot be value-free, and findings cannot be entirely objective as knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Stake, 1995). Further, because I was not examining an existing theory, nor a hypothesis, but rather exploring the experiences of adolescents who participated in a social agency experience, a qualitative approach was more relevant than quantitative (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

After confirming that qualitative research was the right approach for my study, I had to decide which qualitative design was best to answer my research question. There

are different qualitative research designs, such as case study, narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. Case study was the most design that aligned with my study. Case study might be similar to ethnography and narrative research because they share the same unit of analysis, which is a single individual (Yin, 2017). Narrative research, for example, was not a fit for my research because I did not aim at focusing on stories told by individuals (Oliver, 1998). The purpose of my study was not to study the stories of individuals within their culture and culturally shared groups; therefore, ethnography was not an option either (Maxwell, 2009). However, because I planned to compile a detailed case setting description to study the case (Yin, 2017), I found case study as the most appropriate research design to answer my research question.

Phenomenology could be a good design for my research because the focus of research is understanding the essence of experience, studying several individuals who have shared the experience (Strandmark, 2015). However, in phenomenology, I did not find the flexibility of the multiple case study in which I am able to treat each case study separately, compare and contrast the findings between cases, and do cross-case analysis (Yin, 2003). Similarly, I did not aim to generate a theory, and that is why I did not use grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) as my study design. To conclude, case study design was the most applicable research approach to serve the purpose of my study, because I did not aim to describe or interpret cultural aspects of a specific group and how culture may influence behavior; tell the stories of individuals; or generate a theory but rather study the experiences of adolescents comprehensively, focusing on the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral aspects of these experiences.

Because I aimed at exploring the child agency experience in designing and leading community-service initiatives, I found the case study approach is logical to use because it is used when a *how* or *why* questions are posed concerning a contemporary issue that the researcher has little to no control (Yin, 2017). Yin (2003) defined *case study* as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.13). A researcher would use case study approach when there is a need to intentionally cover contextual conditions that could be relevant to the study phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Case study is a comprehensive research strategy (Yin, 2003), which allowed me to get in-depth analysis and understanding of multiple cases, in this case, young people.

### **Role of the Researcher**

A case study researcher can play various roles, such as educator, evaluator, and from a constructivist perspective, an interpreter and data collector (Stake, 1995). My role in this study was interviewer, observer, and document interpreter. *Positionality* is key to understanding the researcher’s role in the various stages of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Positionality refers to the role and social location (identity) of the researcher in association with the research context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Because I was involved in the design and initiation of the youth program, the child empowerment and agency program in which adolescents design and lead community-service initiatives that I studied, I needed to take measures to address positionality and to avoid possibilities for biases.

I ensured *reflexivity* was applied throughout the research by continuously assessing my identity, positionality, and subjectivities to avoid biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For that, I used bracketing, which is a technique used in qualitative research to reduce the possible detrimental impacts of preconceptions which can affect the study process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The bracketing method used was *dialogic engagement* (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), in which I engaged in discussions with an external source to uncover and bring preconceptions and biases into attention.

In dialogic engagement, the supportive and negotiated relationship between the researcher and a nonclinical and nonmanagerial colleague serves as an interface between the researcher and the study data (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing interviews performed before, during, and after data collection may identify topics that could hinder researcher listening or cause a researcher's emotional reactions that could prevent further exploration from being performed. Bracketing interviews with a colleague can improve the researcher's clarity and commitment to the experiences of respondents by revealing the personal experiences that might be forgotten (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

I planned to have a colleague of mine cofacilitate the interviews with me to take notes and for peer check and dialogic engagement before the data collection, at the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages. However, to comply with the ethical requirements for confidentiality, I did not involve anyone in any of the stages of my study except for interview transcription.

I also documented everything I heard throughout the process. Memo writing is an effective way to document anything at any time during the research process so that the researcher has a reference that he or she can go back to and avoid any personal judgment (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Recording is another crucial way to document observations and collected data if consent is obtained (Saldaña, 2016). Therefore, I recorded all interviews and used memo writing throughout the different stages of my study. Although I am one of the establishers of the youth program, this did not impact the selection of participants as I was not involved in the program after 2014. I did not engage or contribute to enrollment, training, or support to the adolescent group of 2015 that I targeted as my study participants. I met them for the first time in the interviews.

### **Methodology**

I used a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design to answer my research questions. Case study is an extensive, holistic description and analysis of a phenomenon such as a program, organization, individual, process, or social unit (Merriam, 1998). Compared to a single case method, multiple case study enables researchers to generate robust findings based on grounded propositions and illustrates concepts and relationships (Reddy, 2015). A multi-case study provides researchers with a platform for systematically collecting, patterning, analyzing, and comparing information across instances and providing more possibilities for publishing than single case study designs (Bengtsson & Larsson, 2012).

Theoretical propositions guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003). For my study, empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995) is the theoretical position which guided

the data collection and analysis. Using the multiple case study design, I took the following steps (Yin, 2003): selection of cases, design of data collection protocol, data collection, data analysis for each case separately, and cross-case analysis.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

In qualitative research, what is important is the in-depth analysis of the research phenomenon, which can be achieved only with a small sample (Burkholder et al., 2016; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Therefore, purposive sampling is useful in qualitative research for the fact it allows researchers to focus on a small number of participants to gather as much information as needed to be able to understand a phenomenon.

Because I targeted adolescents who participated in a child empowerment program to explore their experiences, I used purposeful sampling. Although purposive sampling is dependent on the researcher's judgment, the researcher needs to consider two critical issues. The researcher needs to first establish a set of criteria for the selection of research participants and second to explain a strategy to verify that the participants meet this set of criteria (Burkholder et al., 2016). The criterion for the selection of cases relies on relevance rather than representativeness (Stake, 1994); therefore, case study researchers should establish profound selection criteria to prevent self-interest or biases (Reddy, 2015).

The criteria for selecting my purposeful sampling was young people who (a) took part in the youth program, (b) were enrolled in the program during the war that started in March 2015, (c) were aged between 13 and 17 years when they designed, implemented,

and led their community-service initiatives, and (d) completed all the requirements of the youth program. Following is a summary of the youth program. Although I studied child participation and empowerment experiences, my respondents were adults aged between 18 and 22 years at the time I conducted the interviews. However, the questions were on their experiences when they were adolescents (i.e., aged 13 to 17 years). This group participated in the youth program and implemented their community service initiatives in 2015.

I chose this group for the following reasons: (a) this group implemented their community service initiatives during the first year of the war in Yemen (i.e., 2015), (b) they are now considered adults (18 years and older) and could give consent to their participation in my research (there was no need for parent consents in this case), and (c) there was a 4-year gap between when they completed their community service initiatives and when I conduct the interviews. This gave a chance to explore how their experiences in designing and leading community service initiatives impacted them in the long run as well.

**Youth Program.** The youth program was established by a national Yemeni nongovernmental organization with the aim of developing young leaders with advanced communication and technical skills, as well as knowledge to take action and make positive contributions to their communities. It also aims at activating child participation for imparting a sense of civic responsibility amongst youth. In the youth program, children aged 13 to 17 years are trained on essential life skills, community-based project design and management, and active citizenship.

By the end of this training package, children attain the required skills and knowledge to design, implement, and manage small community service initiatives. With the newly acquired skills in mind, and their own understanding of their subcommunities, children—in small groups—identify the needs and opportunities in their areas, and then initiate small projects responding to these needs. After completing their community service initiatives, children present and celebrate the results of their work by having an open day, where parents, school staff, community figures, and others are invited to see the achievements of the children.

### **Instrumentation**

The instruments I used for my study were interviews, archival photographs, as well as reports, publications, and documents used as part of the adolescents' experiences in leading and implementing the community service initiatives. The main instrument for data collection was interviews. I used the pre- and post-questionnaire used by Zimmerman et al. (2018) in their study "Youth Empowerment Solutions: Evaluation of an After-School Program to Engage Middle School Students in Community Change" as a guide for the development of the interview questions. I decided to use this Zimmerman's pre- and post-questionnaire after consultation with Zimmerman himself. He suggested I use the questionnaire as a guide for the kinds of questions to ask in the interview. Moreover, the questions in the questionnaire were designed to target adolescents, which is the same age group I targeted. The questionnaire was also used to study the experiences of adolescents in contributing to community change, which is also similar to



the youth program, through which the adolescent I targeted as participants led and implemented community service initiatives.

The questionnaire focuses on the three components of empowerment theory; namely, intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral. Using the questionnaire, I developed 25 questions listed under each component and subcomponent (see Appendix 2). Although the majority of questions were open-ended, there were some questions that were closed ended but followed with open-ended questions to get details on the experiences.

The other instrument I used was archival photography. For interviews, photography produces evidence, to support social research (Tinkler, 2013), which make it possible to capture illusive meanings (Glaw et al., 2017). Through photography, respondents could clarify what actually happened, which supports the findings' trustworthiness through member check (Glaw et al., 2017).

Because I conducted the interviews on experiences that happened 4 years ago, I requested the organization that is running the youth program, to share photos that were publicly published and were taken during the implementation of the community service initiatives. I confirmed with the organization that these photos were consented. Finally, I planned to use other archived resources such as reports, publications, documents, flyers, and any other materials used as part of the adolescents' experiences in leading and implementing the community service initiatives. However, the organization was able to share only a report, photos, and links to media releases, which I used to support the analysis and results.

**Recruitment and Participation.**

Contacting the organization that runs the youth program was the first procedure for participant recruitment. I introduced my study to them and asked for their assistance to distribute my recruitment flyer to the young people who participated in the youth program in 2015 in Sana'a, Aden, Ibb, and Hadhramout governorates. These young people, who are adults now—aged 18 years and older—were not in the program anymore; hence there was not any possibility of coercion. Their last connection to the organization and youth program was in 2015 when they implemented their community service initiatives. Moreover, the role of the organization was only disseminating the recruitment flyer to the young people. It was then up to the young people to contact me if they were interested in participating in my study. The organization did not facilitate the recruitment or neither supported me in any part of my study.

The recruitment flyer included an introduction of myself and information on the study and its purpose, the required age for participants, and what is expected from the participants. Those interested in participating in my study reached out to me via the contact information in the recruitment flyer. I then sent the consent form (see Appendix A) to those who contacted me in order to have their consent to participate in the study. Once I received the signed consent forms for those who were interested, I contacted them to arrange for a time for the interview according to their availability.

The theoretical sampling objective is to select cases which are likely to replicate or extend the emerging theory and the number can be between four to 10 cases (Kathleen, 1989; Reddy, 2015). The number of participants that I aimed at reaching was four to six

young people, at least one from each city. I actually was able to interview five participants, which aligns with the plan. The plan was to conduct these interviews in person if applicable. However, I conducted all interviews virtually using different platforms due to the unstable security situation in Yemen and COVID19 travel restrictions.

### **Data Collection**

After the participants sent their signed consent forms and their availability for the interview, I set the date and time for the interviews. I finalized the interview protocol (see Appendix B) and translated it into Arabic. Using the protocol, I conducted each interview separately. Each interview was around one hour long. After getting consent from the participants, I recorded all interviews. I also took notes of the answers and any observations during the interviews.

According to Yin (2003), there are six data collection instruments in case study: documentation, archival documents, interviews, direct observations, observations of participants, and artifacts. For my study, I used reports, photos, and media releases that used publicly for the adolescents' agency experiences of designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives. As for the archival photography, during the interview, as part of the question that asks participants to describe their experience in designing and leading community-service initiatives, I asked the participants about the photos and how they describe their agency experiences.

## **Data Analysis Plan**

As defined by Yin (2003) data analysis comprises of examination, categorization, tabulation, and testing. There are different approaches for data analysis, such as explanation building, time-series analysis, pattern matching, and cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2003). Because my research is multiple cases study, the cross-case synthesis is the most applicable technique for data analysis. After conducting the interviews with the study cases, I transcribed the interviews into an excel sheet that I predesigned and organized in a way that is matching the list of interview questions and the categories and subcategories of the questions. Because the interviews were conducted in Arabic, I used Microsoft Excel as other qualitative software, such as NVivo, do not support Arabic. This made it easy to do the transcription and later the data analysis of individual cases and then the cross-case analysis. Transcription and data analysis were carried out in Arabic. I did the cross-case synthesis in English.

I analyzed each individual interview, and then did cross-case analysis for cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2003). For the analysis I used the categories and subcategories of empowerment theory as precodes. I then coded and categorized the precodes' results to obtain themes (Saldaña, 2016). Coding is the first initial step of the 'analysis and interpretation of data (Saldaña, 2016). It is a linking and cyclical action, through which data is filtered and highlighted in order to generate categories, themes, and concepts, resulting in meaning and outcomes (Saldaña, 2016).

With coding and recoding, the codes are rearranged and reclassified into categories (Saldaña, 2016). And then when the most important categories are identified

and consolidated, the outcome is a theme or concept (Saldaña, 2016). These themes under each component and sub-component in my interview protocol, which are derived from the empowerment theory, informed the outcomes of the cross-case analysis.

As for the archival photography analysis, I started with coding the data by naming the photos as participants identify them with the description participants provided. Based on these codes, I grouped the photos in themes in a table (Glaw et al., 2017). Although I could have consider aspects of the photos, including images, color, shading, meaning, and content (Glaw et al., 2017), I focused on meaning and content only to support the outcomes of the interviews. I used the most relevant and representative photos that do not show people to support the interviews. I did not deal with the photos' themes separately but rather as a supporting data to the interviews.

As for the analysis of other data collection instruments, I used the report and media releases in the analysis and interpretation of data. I translated the information I used from these materials from Arabic into English.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Setting and describing the case study design and procedures is central as it enhances transparency and supports research trustworthiness (Reddy, 2015). For addressing the study trustworthiness, I planned to use the following measures:

#### **Credibility**

According to Cope (2014), credibility refers to which extent is the data, interpretations, and findings are credible and reasonable to the participants. I planned to address credibility through the notetaking and member checks (Cope, 2014) between me

and my colleague. I planned to have my colleague check the qualitative data collection and transcription. He would attend the interviews with me to take notes and for peer-debriefing after the interviews. He would also check the transcription and the interpretation of data. The plan was to have my colleague's assistance in verifying data but not to contribute to data collection or analysis. I planned to also sign a confidentiality agreement with my colleague.

### **Transferability**

The provision of sufficient explanation about participants, setting, and procedures helps ensure transferability because it is useful in order to check the similarity for a possible application (Cope, 2014). The details I provided in this chapter about the study design, procedure, data collection, analysis, and interpretation contributed to the transferability of my study. I ensured that I presented details about data analysis, procedures of getting codes, categories, and themes in my dissertation, giving the opportunity to others to conduct the same study in other contexts.

### **Dependability**

Dependability exists if the research is repeated in similar contexts yielding to similar results (Cope, 2014). The use of data collection tools and theoretical framework that have been used previously helped the dependability of my dissertation. The cases I selected for data collection were from different cities that have different geographies, dialects, and traditions, which also contributed to the dependability of my study.

### **Confirmability**

If findings emerge from the collected data rather than the biases of the researcher, then confirmability is ensured (Cope, 2014). Measures that I used to ensure confirmability in my dissertation included transcriptions of the data, two cycles of codes were produced, comparison between the different sources of information, note taking, triangulation, and peer check. Moreover, the findings were supported by quotes from the qualitative data, which supported that the findings are from the collected data rather than the researcher's biases.

### **Ethical Considerations**

There are many ethical considerations that need to be addressed before and during the study. Although the participants I targeted in my study are adults aged 18 years and older who spoke about their experiences when they were adolescents, I used the child participation evaluation checklist recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) in its General Comment No. 12. The checklist ensured that I was addressing the various aspects of the study ethical considerations. Some of the characteristics of the experience that participants go through, as addressed in the checklist, include being transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, inclusive, safe, and sensitive to risk (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). I ensured these characteristics are followed throughout the study, especially through participants' recruitment and data collection.

Moreover, informed consent was requested, addressing the safety and protection of participants as well as their voluntary participation in research (National Institutes of

Health, 2008). Participants were provided with adequate details about the study in order to make informed and voluntary decision to participate. Confidentiality was also ensured in this study. I ensured keeping the research participants' identity information confidential ensuring and respecting their privacy.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed my research design and why it was the best fit to serve the purpose of my study and answer my research question. I found qualitative exploratory multiple case study an appropriate design because case study is an extensive, holistic description and analysis (Merriam, 1998), which provides in-depth analysis and understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Moreover, multiple case study enables researchers to generate robust findings based on grounded propositions and illustrates concepts and relationships (Reddy, 2015). With this design, I could explore the experiences of adolescents in their experiences of designing and leading community service initiatives, and how that impacted their development and their community at large.

I also discussed my plans for participants selection, sharing the rationale for the selection and the procedures for recruitment and participation. After that, I explained the interview protocol as my primary data collection instrument. I also discussed how I would use archival photography as a secondary data collection instrument. Further, I provided details on how I would conduct the interviews and carry out the transcription, analysis, individual case analysis, and cross-case synthesis. I finally provided details on how I would address trustworthiness and the ethical considerations in my study.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the experiences of adolescents who, at ages 13 to 17 years in four cities in Yemen, participated in a social agency experience (i.e., implementing and leading community service initiatives designed to contribute to the welfare of their communities as part of the Youth Program). The study participants were youth aged 18 years and older who were adolescents aged 13 to 17 years at the time they implemented their community service initiatives. In this study, I explored their experiences in designing, leading, and implementing their community-service initiatives and how these experiences contributed to their development as adolescents and now as adults. My goal was to fill the gap of the lack of scholarly work on child participation and agency in the context of war and emergencies. Another gap that I addressed was the lack of scholarly research on child participation and agency in Yemen.

Although my focus was on adolescents' experiences in leading and implementing community-service initiatives, the study participants were youth aged 18 years and older who shared their adolescent experiences. The primary research question for this study was: What are the experiences of empowerment and agency in adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 of leading community service projects with the goal of contributing to the welfare of their communities in Yemen?

In this chapter, I explain the setting and demographics of my study participants as well as the participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Additionally, I

discuss the evidence of trustworthiness in relation to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I finally present the results related to my research questions based on the precodes I used from the theoretical framework, which led the interview questions, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Setting**

Initially, I planned to travel to Yemen to conduct the interviews in person. However, due to Yemen's security situation at the time of data collection and the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, I was not able to travel. Therefore, I conducted all interviews virtually, using different platforms that the interviewees requested to use. Poor Internet connectivity in Yemen was a challenge, which made it impossible to conduct a full interview at once without interruptions. Due to the time difference between Canada and Yemen, availability for the interviews was a challenge. I had to conduct most of the interviews between 5:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. my time, which was an afternoon for the interviewees.

Another challenge was signing the consent form. As participants were self-isolating at home due to COVID-19, most of them did not have access to a printer and a scanner to print out the consent form and sign and scan it. Therefore, I asked them to write their full names in the signature space and to write in their email that they consented to participate. The participants were understanding and sent a Word version of the consent form with all spaces completed with a confirmation in the body of the email.

### **Demographics**

The five youths who participated in my research interview were all from Yemen, with ages ranging from 18–22 years old, from four different governorates. The age of the participants when they implemented their community service initiatives ranged between 14 and 17 years of age. Three of the participants were university students, one had just graduated from high school and was working at the time of the interview, and one will start university next year. I limited collecting demographic data to participants' age range at the time of their involvement and their education to protect their confidentiality.

### **Data Collection**

I followed the plan for data collection as set in Chapter 3; however, the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged the process and made it a challenging process for both the participants and me.

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

The criteria for selecting my purposeful sampling were young people who (a) took part in the youth program; (b) were enrolled in the program during the war in Yemen that started in March 2015; (c) were aged between 18 and 22 years at the time of the interview and were aged between 13 and 17 years when they designed, implemented, and led their community-service initiatives; and (d) completed all the requirements of the youth program. A summary of the youth program is in the next section.

I chose this group specifically because I did not contribute to any of their recruitment, training, or mentorship, which helped minimize my biases. It was my first time meeting them in the interview. Moreover, I chose this group because they

implemented their community service initiatives during the first year of the war in Yemen (i.e., 2015), which was a criterion for participation. Another reason why I chose this group is the fact that they are now considered adults (18 years and older) and could give consent to their participation in my research. This group was a relevant choice because there was a 4- to 5-year gap between when they completed their community service initiatives and when I conducted the interviews. This gave me the chance to explore how their experiences in designing and leading community service initiatives impacted them over time as well.

**Youth Program.** The Youth Program was established by a national Yemeni nongovernmental organization with the aim of developing young leaders with advanced communication, technical and essential life skills, and knowledge to take action and make positive contributions to their communities. It also aims at activating child participation as well for imparting a sense of civic responsibility amongst youth. Within the youth program, children aged 13 to 17 years receive training on essential life skills, community-based project design and management, and active citizenship.

After receiving the training package, children attain the required skills and knowledge to design, implement, and manage small community service initiatives. With the newly acquired skills in mind, and their own understanding of their subcommunities, adolescents—in small groups—identify the needs and opportunities in their areas, and then initiate mini-projects responding to these needs. After completing their community service initiatives, children present and celebrate the results of their work by having an

open day, where parents, school staff, community figures, and others are invited to see the adolescents' achievements.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Right after my application was approved by the IRB on April 10, 2020, I sent the recruitment flyer to the organization that runs the youth program to distribute it to the young people who participated in the youth program in 2015 in Sana'a, Aden, Ibb, and Hadhramout governorates. I started receiving emails from volunteers the day after the flyer was distributed. For the first 4 days, I received emails from five participants who showed interest. I replied to the emails with the consent form, requesting them to read and sign the consent form.

Signing the form was a challenge as the participants were self-isolated due to COVID-19 and did not have access to a printer, in keeping with the approved IRB procedure, they printed their names in the signature space and sent back the consent form confirming their acceptance to participate in the interview. Once I received the signed consent forms from the five interested participants, I contacted them to arrange for a day and time for the interviews according to their availability. Due to the time difference between Canada and Yemen, I conducted most of the interviews between 5:00 and 8:00 a.m. my time, which was afternoon for the participants.

### **Interviews**

The recruitment flyer clearly specified the age range for participation (i.e.: 18 to 22 years). However, two of the five participants who first provided consent to participate in the study did not meet the participation criteria. I discovered that the first participant

did not meet the criteria after I finished the interview. Her age was 24 years, and she was a participant of the youth program in 2011 instead of 2015. Due to that interview, I started the remaining interviews by checking the participation criteria first. Only three met the criteria, as another one was an adult aged 19 years at the time she implemented her community service initiative. I archived the data from these two volunteers but did not use this data in my study.

I ended up with only three interviews, which did not meet the number I set in Chapter 3 (i.e., four to six participants). Snowball sampling was my only option to get to the number of participants, for which I planned. I contacted the three interviewed participants and asked them to distribute my recruitment flyer to their peers who participated in the youth program and who met the participation criteria. With snowball sampling, I was able to get a fourth participant.

As a last attempt to recruit participants, I asked the organization that runs the youth program to distribute the recruitment flyer again to the youth. After redistributing the flyer, I was able to get a fifth participant, so the number of study participants who met the selection criteria and provided consent to participate in my study was five, which aligned with the number I set in Chapter 3.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic. The plan was for me to have a colleague of mine attend the interviews and help me with taking notes and verifying the answers. However, having another person in the interview did not meet ethical requirements for confidentiality; therefore, I conducted all interviews alone. Using the interview protocol, I conducted five interviews with the five participants. Each interview lasted between 45

to 75 minutes. After getting consent from the participants, I audio recorded all interviews and took notes of the answers and observations I had during the interviews.

Internet connectivity on the participants' side was a significant challenge. No interview took place in one sitting; there were many interruptions. For one of the participants, her Internet connection was so weak that we could not have an audio call to conduct the interview. As a solution, we used audio recording in an application called EMO. The interview took approximately 4 days as I would ask the question, and the participant answered a few hours later, depending on her availability. Depending on her answer, I would usually ask follow-up questions. After I received all the interview and follow-up questions' answers, I recorded all audio recordings into one file for transcription. There were around 75 recordings, varying between 15 seconds to two minutes, resulting in a complete interview of around 54 minutes.

### **Other Data Sources**

Other data sources that I used for the data analysis and results included a program report, media coverage links, and photos that the organization that runs the youth program consented to share with me. I also asked the participants during the interviews to share any photos they might still have. Two of them had a few photos and shared them with me. I used the photos that showed their initiatives but that did not show people to avoid any possible identification of participants. I used the photos to support the analysis and results.

### **Data Analysis**

I used the components and subcomponents of the theoretical framework, empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman 2000), as precodes for the interview protocol as well as the data analysis and results. The three components composed of the intrapersonal component (leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, self-esteem), interactional component (adult mentorship, adult resources, resource mobilization), and behavioral component (leadership behavior, community engagement, school engagement). Using Zimmerman's (2018) questionnaire, I developed 25 questions listed under each subcomponent, as presented in the interview protocol.

Because my study was multiple case study, I used the cross-case synthesis (see Yin, 2017) for analysis. After conducting the interviews with the study cases, I signed a confidentiality agreement with a colleague to help with interview transcription. Each interview was transcribed in a separate file. I then designed an Excel spreadsheet that was organized in a way that matched the list of interview questions and the precodes, i.e., components and subcomponents of empowerment theory. Because the interviews were in Arabic, I used Microsoft Excel because other qualitative software, such as NVivo, do not support Arabic.

This Excel sheet helped me in organizing the answers under each component and subcomponent of empowerment theory. This helped with data analysis of individual cases and then the cross-case analysis. I carried out data analysis in Arabic, but the cross-case synthesis was in English, including the quotes, which I translated from Arabic to English. Using the Excel sheet, I coded and categorized the answers to obtain themes



(Saldaña, 2016) within the predetermined codes. I then went through the similarities and differences of answers against each pre-code. These themes under each of the precodes, i.e., components and subcomponents of empowerment theory, informed the outcomes and themes of the cross-case analysis.

As for the archival photography analysis, I used the photos that the organizations and participants shared with me to confirm certain passages in the results. Some of these photos are presented under the Community Engagement section under the Results section below. Only the photos that did not show people were used in the study in order to avoid any potential exposure of participants' identities.

As for the analysis of other data collection instruments, I only had a program report and links to different media coverage from the organization that runs the youth program. I used these resources to supplement the interview answers. I translated the data I used from these secondary sources from Arabic into English.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The first measure I used to address trustworthiness was the detailed description of the case study design and procedures as it enhances transparency (see Reddy, 2015). For addressing the study's trustworthiness, I used the following measures.

#### **Credibility**

According to Cope (2014), credibility refers to the extent to which the data, interpretations, and findings are credible and reasonable to the participants. Although the plan was to have a colleague of mine attend the interviews with me for notetaking and member checks as a measure to address credibility (see Cope, 2014), I ended up

conducting the interviews alone. Furthermore, during the interviews themselves, I verified the content of the participants' answers by summarizing the answers to the participants to have their confirmation of the content. I also used the photos that the organization and participants shared to support the data.

### **Transferability**

Sufficient explanation of the participants, setting, and procedures is used to ensure transferability; it is useful to provide a basis for a possible application in a different context (Cope, 2014). I provided details in this chapter about the setting, demographics, recruitment process, selection criteria, data collection, analysis, and interpretation that contribute to my study's transferability. In this chapter, I presented the details on the procedures of data analysis, precodes analysis and results, and themes. Others can conduct the same study in other contexts using the detailed procedures provided in this chapter.

### **Dependability**

Dependability exists if the research is repeated in similar contexts yielding similar results (Cope, 2014). The data collection tools and theoretical framework that I used for my data collection and analysis have been used previously. By using these tools and this framework, I ensured dependability. Moreover, the cases I selected for data collection were from different cities that have different geographies, dialects, and traditions. The results were similar across the cases that come from different contexts, which also contributed to the dependability of my study.

## **Confirmability**

I recorded my interviews with participants to ensure confirmability. Recording is a crucial way to document observations and collected data if consent is obtained (Saldaña, 2016). I also conducted data transcription in two stages. In the first stage, I transcribed each individual interview separately. Then I transcribed each interview question in the Excel sheet I designed based on the components and subcomponents of empowerment theory that I used as my precodes.

I also conducted two cycles of codes and categories for each pre-code, comparing between the sources of data, note-taking, and triangulation. Moreover, my findings were supported by quotes from the interviews, which supports that the findings are from the collected data rather than the researcher's biases. I also made sure that I documented everything I saw and heard throughout the process. Memo writing is an effective way to document anything at any time during the research process so that the researcher has a reference that he or she can go back to and avoid any personal judgment (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Furthermore, I had to take different measures to avoid my biases because I was one of the co-founders of the youth program. I used *reflexivity* throughout the research by continuously assessing my identity, positionality, and subjectivities to avoid biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For that, I used bracketing, a technique used in qualitative research to reduce the possible detrimental impacts of preconceptions, which can affect the study process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Although I was one of the establishers of the youth program, this did not impact the selection of participants as I was not involved

in the program after 2014, and I did not intervene or contribute to enrollment, training, or support to the participants. I met the participants for the first time in the interviews.

### **Results**

I used the components and subcomponents of my theoretical framework, empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman 2000), as precodes for data analysis. The three components consist of the intrapersonal component (leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, self-esteem), interactional component (adult mentorship, adult resources, resource mobilization), and behavioral component (leadership behavior, community engagement, school engagement). These precodes assisted me in organizing my interview questions, and later with the data transcription, analysis, and results. The analysis results of all precodes resulted in a model of child agency as well as five themes that are the findings of the study. In the result section here, I present the analysis results under each precode. I then present the model and the five themes that are resultant of the analysis result of the precodes. I discuss and interpret the model as well as the five findings in details in chapter 5.

## Results of Precodes

In this section, I present the results of the precodes (i.e. the three components of empowerment theory with their corresponding subcategories). See Figure 2.

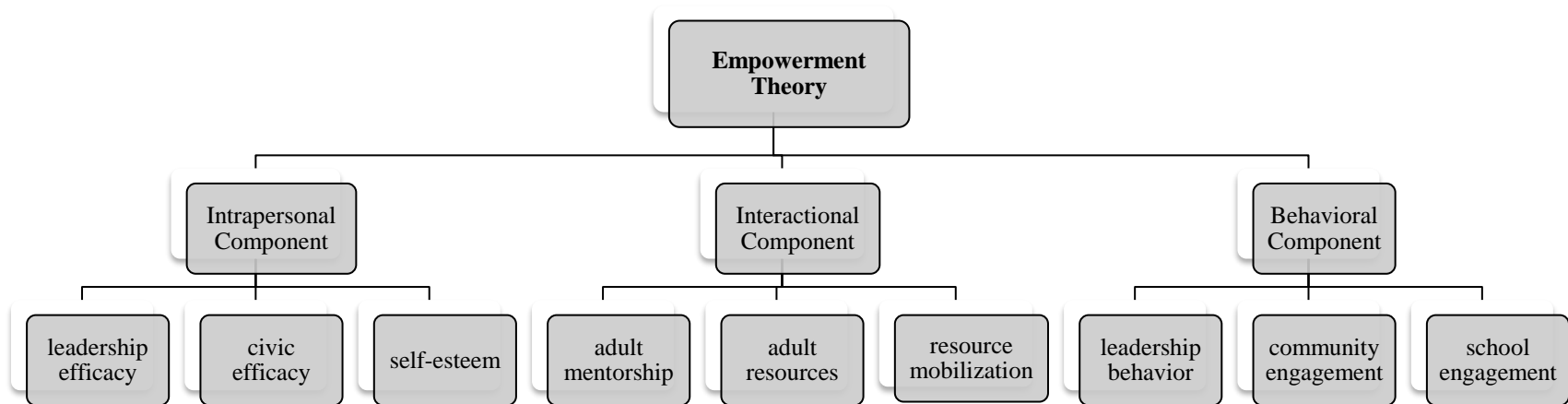


Figure 2. Empowerment theory outcomes.

**Intrapersonal Component.** The intrapersonal component consists of three subcomponents: leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, and self-esteem, see Figure 3.

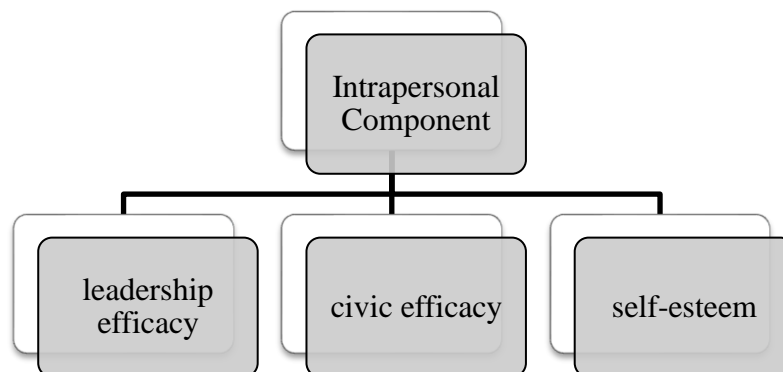


Figure 3. Intrapersonal component.

**Leadership efficacy.** In the interviews, under this section, I asked participants to describe their experience in leading the community service initiatives and how they thought about themselves in terms of leading groups, organizing people to get things done, and getting people to follow their ideas now, before, and after the community service initiatives. The answers varied, showing different experiences with some similarities.

Respondents 1 and 4 expressed that they had the desire to be leaders in contributing to social change and supporting their communities prior to their experience in leading and implementing community service initiatives. However, due to the lack of awareness among these two participants of their capabilities, their poor appreciation for themselves, their lack of guidance, and lack of opportunities to participate in youth empowerment programs, they expressed they were not able to give much. Participant 4

expressed that she had the desire to be a leader but did not know how. The opportunity to design, lead, and implement community service initiatives made her realize that she could be a leader, saying:

Since the first community service initiative I led with my friends in 2015, I now feel better because I am able to lead since I held different roles in my current work position. A recent example is a project I led to open a shelter house for abused women. I led the project from start to end to open the shelter for women's care and rehabilitation.

Participants 2 and 3 expressed that they did not know they were able to lead until they led their community service initiatives. Participant 2 shared that he was young and did not even know what the terms leader or leadership meant.

The training we received included things that we had never thought of previously. I learned how to deal with others, including those we support, donors, and even opponents. I learned about planning, which helped me with the community service initiatives I led. The first community service initiative I led was challenging as it was my first time, but as I implemented more and more initiatives, I feel I can now support those in need. It became a habit that every Ramadan, I collect donations, and with the help of some friends, we distribute food baskets to those in need. It is rewarding to see beneficiaries happy with the outcomes of our help and to hear their prayers

Participant 3 shared that he felt he was a leader prior to the community service initiatives saying, "I may have had previous leadership skills, but they increased after the training and contributed to the project's success. I mean, the experience influenced me in how I better deal with others, working with a spirit of responsibility. I am able now to lead and implement community service and humanitarian initiatives." He added that the initiative he worked on was his first and last big community service initiative as he became busy with university.

Similar to Participant 3, Participant 1 had to stop working in community service initiatives as well, but for a different reason. There was resistance from and confrontation with some adults around him, which made the participant withdraw and stop working on community service initiatives. He expressed that he was not a leader prior to his experience of leading community service initiatives, but his friends in the community center used to listen to him, appreciate his advice, and follow his lead. This shows how he did not realize that he was truly a leader without the label "leader" even before enrolling in the community service initiatives. That participant felt that given him the opportunity to lead community service initiatives and to engage in community activities beyond his community center boosted his leadership skills saying, "I felt others' respect towards me...this motivated me and gave me the motive to give even more."

*Civic efficacy.* In the interview, participants were asked to describe themselves in relation to their ability to be involved in activities that contribute to positive change in their communities and making their communities better places by helping others in need.



The participants then shared their perspective on their community service initiatives experience whether this experience influenced their civic efficacy after the initiative and today. This section focuses on how participants perceived themselves in terms of civic efficacy and how that was presented in their daily lives. More about the community service examples the participants led and contributed to are presented in the "Community Engagement" section below.

*Participants' perspectives.* Answers to these interview questions varied, but all participants expressed that the community service initiatives they designed, implemented, and led contributed significantly to how they see themselves now with respect to civic efficacy. Participants 1 and 4 expressed that they always felt that they could contribute to social change but did not know how. Participant 4 said:

The community service project I implemented and led as part of the youth program was my first community service experience. Previously, I did not know anything about the world of projects and initiatives. I did not understand, but through the training and implementation of my community service initiative, I learned the basics of how to start an initiative, how to design, how to talk, and how to deal with others. I always had the desire to serve the community by nature, and I knew I had something inside me that I wanted to show out but did not know how. Previously my only community engagement was through the poetry I used to recite during the school morning radio, but now I am volunteering with the

biggest women organizations in the city, which was the first step towards my current career.

Participant 1 shared that he always liked to fix things he thought were not right. For example, he shared that he supported his peers and younger students by raising awareness, such as educating them on the importance of personal hygiene, especially with the spreading epidemics in the country. His activity was only within the community center he was enrolled at, which then expanded to outside as he and his friends went out to collect donations to implement their community service initiatives: “[t]he project we implemented added a lot to our skills. We got to know other people. We started to learn how to respect each other’s opinions. People started to accept us as active community members.”

Similarly, Participant 2 expressed that he did not know what “initiatives” or “community service” meant prior to his first experience in community service, with the justification that he was young and was not aware of such things. His first experience in the community service initiative he designed and implemented as part of the youth program was his first experience playing a leading role. Previously, he contributed to existing initiatives led by others, such as cleaning the school and neighborhood. However, the participant stated that his first community service initiative made him realize his sense of civic efficacy and that he can give back to the community. His community service initiative within the youth program was his first, but it was the start to other initiatives that he continued to lead until now.

Participants 1, 2, and 3 shared that helping others in need is an "instinct" that they always had but did not know how to achieve. Participant 2, for example, expressed that he always believes that it is natural to help others if a person has the ability and resources to do so. His first community service initiative was the starting point towards continuous community service that he does every year during Ramadan, which is the month of giving for Muslims. Donors saw his credibility, and now they regularly give him donations to provide food baskets to those in need.

The first community service project I implemented made me feel emotional relief because I was able to help others. The feeling I had was indescribable when the beneficiaries prayed for my wellness and happiness after my friends and I helped fix their house. That motivated me to continue working on community service initiatives. Since then, I have been collecting donations and supported with whatever I can help with during school break in Ramadan.

*Emotional relief and self-achievement.* It is worth mentioning that the feeling of emotional relief and satisfaction was expressed by all participants because of their community service initiatives. They expressed that the outcomes of their initiatives were rewarding, especially with the gratitude and appreciation of the community members who benefited from their community service initiatives. For participant 2, the happiness of the beneficiaries made him dedicate his time during Ramadan to serve those in need every year. For Participant 4, the self-satisfaction she had from her first community service initiative made her volunteer in one of the biggest women organizations in her city.

Other participants expressed that the success of their initiatives and the prayers they received from the beneficiaries is an indescribable feeling, which motivated them to give more. Participant 5 said, "I felt more confident after implementing the project. I felt so positive, happy, and proud of myself because I was able to implement a community service project and succeeded. I was able to serve others," and Participant 2 said, "The first community service project I implemented made me feel emotional relief because I was able to help others. The feeling I had was indescribable when the beneficiaries prayed for my wellness and happiness after my friends and I helped fix their house."

*Continuation of community service initiatives.* Participants were then asked how they continued to perceive themselves after their first community service initiatives and today as adults. All of them confirmed that they continued to have the desire to help others, but only two of the five are still active with community service initiatives now as adults. Participant 2 gained some donors' trust who continued to donate money to support Participant 2's food baskets initiative. Participant 4 continued as a volunteer for an organization that supports abused women. Through her volunteer work, she is now an employee with that organization.

The reasons varied on why the other three participants did not continue with community service activities. Participant 3 shared that he is now busy with university, which he described as demanding. Participant 5 expressed that he felt strongly about helping others, especially nowadays, as there are many people in dire need of basic necessities due to the war. However, he cannot do much as there is a lack of resources.

These two participants did not continue working on community service initiatives or activities due to external factors, such as a lack of resources and being busy with other priorities.

Participant 1 had worked on community service after the first community service initiative until recently when he stopped due to disappointment and discouragement from the decision-making adults around him. According to him, these adults deprived him of his basic rights of expressing his views and participating in matters affecting him and his peers.

*Self-esteem.* The interview questions under this section were around how participants felt towards their self-esteem, whether they felt positive towards themselves, and if they had much to feel proud of before and after their experience in leading and implementing community service initiatives. When participants shared a change in self-esteem due to the community service initiatives, they then answered a follow-up question on how and what made them feel a difference. Participants disclosed that the different trainings, resources, mentorship, and the practical approach of self-led designing and implementing of community service initiatives significantly improved their self-esteem, which was either non-existent or negligible prior to this agency experience.

Participant 4 communicated that she used to be shy until two of the trainers encouraged her to talk and present her ideas in front of others in the training. She shared they taught her how to stand and talk before audience. With the support and encouragement of these trainers, this female participant said, "with the trainers' support

and after several attempts, I was able to break my timidity. They taught me how to stand and present to audiences; they taught me how to be confident." The participant felt she was given the opportunity to learn about her innate capabilities that she did not know about, which increased her confidence.

One of the initiatives Participant 4 designed and led with her peers was a recreational public community event in a public park. With the skills she learned in the training, the participant expressed that she and her friend were successful in hosting and presenting the event, which was her first public speaking experience. She felt this experience enhanced her self-esteem significantly and opened the door for her for other opportunities, including her current career that involves different organization and leadership responsibilities.

Similarly, with the support and mentorship provided by the trainers and mentors, Participant 1 felt he was able to recognize his rights and responsibilities. The participant felt that it had been the norm to not give a chance to adolescents to express themselves in the community center where he used to spend most of his time, saying "we were like prisoners; expressing views wasn't allowed, going to the center Office wasn't allowed, raising the awareness of children wasn't allowed." One of the mentors later provided this participant with training opportunities, resources, and helped enroll him in child rights training, events, and activities. The participant felt that being active in these activities made him realize that he has rights and responsibilities as an adolescent, which he considered as new knowledge for him and people working in his community center

The knowledge, resources, and tools Participant 1 gained gave him the confidence to discuss child rights with the management of the community center, and he was able to convince them to make changes to how the center operated and how children were treated. As described by Participant 1, the adjustments he recommended, including the introduction of a child rights code of conduct and the child charter, were value added. The center leadership applied these adjustments and made all staff aware of these improvements.

Although the participant felt all these changes and support he received when he implemented his community service initiatives enhanced his self-esteem significantly, he recently felt depressed as he started seeing the adverse implications of the children's rights, for which he had been advocating. According to Participant 1, there is a lack of awareness among some adults about children's rights as they think it is a different ideology that is against their traditions. Because of their lack of awareness about children's rights, they secluded Participant 1 and deprived him from entitled opportunities.

The other two participants expressed that they always felt confident; however, the training and opportunity they were given to design and implement their own community service initiatives increased their self-esteem. Participant 3 said:

I felt positive towards myself... I mean, I was optimistic and positive, but the marginalization .... I mean marginalizing the youth in the community ... that is happening in Yemen creates frustration and devastation among youth. However,

after I worked on the community service initiatives with my friends, and we were able to provide wheelchairs to some people with disabilities from donations we collected from some small businesses, I felt that we need to help those in need and that there are things that we can do for the community. After helping those people, I felt a big difference in my self-esteem. I felt that I was a part of the society, being able to help and give as much as I can. Watching how happy those we helped were meant a lot to me. This experience increased my positivity and confidence.

As for Participant 2, he was not sure what to answer about self-esteem as he thought that he was young before his first community service initiatives and did not ever thought about what self-recognition or self-esteem was.

After implementing many community service initiatives, I became more confident. In my first experience, my confidence was almost nonexistent, and I was anxious that we would not have support and the project would fail. But my family encouraged me, and we motivated each other in the team, and we were able to implement the project with success. This first experience boosted my confidence. The more I implemented community service initiatives, the more I got confident. Implementing many community service initiatives for the past few years gave me strong experience, which increased my confidence. I now start a project with confidence as I now know how to do a situational analysis of all



aspect of implementing a community service project including threats, pros, and cons.

**Interactional component.** This component consists of adult mentorship, adult resources, and resource mobilization (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman et al., 2018), See Figure 4. In this study, I only focused on adult mentorship and resource mobilization as the focus of my study was on aspects directly related to the youths' experiences of community service initiatives.

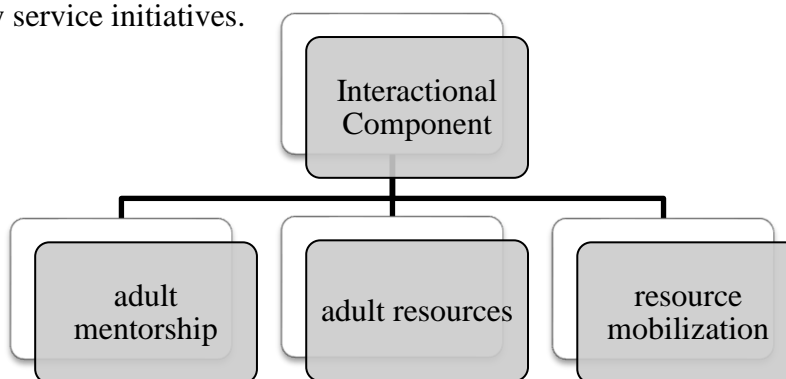


Figure 4. Interactional component.

**Adult mentorship.** Under this section, interview questions included whether participants had an adult mentor in their life that they went to for support or someone they went to for advice or someone who wanted them to do their best before and after their community service initiatives. Participants were then asked to share who that adult is and how this adult helped. All participants had adult mentors prior to their community service initiatives except one whose experience with adults was negative according to his description. Prior to the community service initiatives, three participants shared that adult mentors were mostly direct family members such as mothers, fathers, and aunts.

Participant 4, for example, had her aunt as her role model since she was young. Her aunt was active and used to take her niece with her to workshops and trips she attended as part of her job. Participant 4 tried to be like her aunt but did not know how until she had her first community service initiative experience. As part of the training she received in the youth program, she expressed that the trainers and mentors pushed her to be more open and active, saying “with the trainers’ support and after several attempts, I was able to break my timidity. They taught me how to stand and present to audiences; they taught me how to be confident.” Although she always had her aunt with her as a supporter and mentor, she was motivated by external mentors who kept on pushing her to participate until she surpassed her shyness and led her own community service initiatives.

Likewise, Participant 3 had his mother as his supporter, saying, "My mother was always there to support me, and she did not fail in supporting and encouraging me." However, Participant 3 did not have any adult mentors who were educated and knowledgeable of community engagement until his community service initiative experience. In this experience, Participant 3 shared that he was trained by trainers who then supported and mentored him, saying

During my community service initiative, I used to consult and return to the trainer, whom I consulted on things I did not know before. This trainer was accessible all the time. He was always there when I needed a consultation. In fact, prior to my first community service initiative. I did not have any mentors; they were all only friends and colleagues. After the youth program training, I got to

know and work with trainers, from whom I benefited a lot and were always there to support.

Participant 2 had a similar adult mentorship experience when he was an adolescent. His mentor was his father who supported him with guidance, especially around the community service initiative ideas and plans. However, Participant 2 shared the training he received in the youth program and his first community service initiative built his capabilities and skills, and so he felt he did not need adult mentorship. He was able to build rapport and trust with donors and now has regular donations for his community service initiatives, saying "[a]fter my first community service initiative, I do not think I consulted anyone in most of my projects, I mean, in some projects, I rarely spoke to my father, I planned the projects and gathered support myself."

Participant 5 shared that he received support from the principal of his community center, in which he spent most of his time. He also reported that he has been supported by the trainers and mentors who trained him in 2015 when he implemented his first community service initiative. He concluded his statement saying that the mentors from the youth program continued to support him until the time of the interview. However, his challenge has been the lack of resources to implement community service initiatives.

An apparent similarity among the four participants is that their adult mentorship was limited to their direct family members. None of them had an adult mentor from school, neighborhood, religious places, or the community at large. The word 'mentor' was

not a word that the participants were familiar with, which shows the lack of mentorship activities or education programs in different settings, especially at school.

Participant 1 had a different experience with adult mentors than the other participants. He shared that before his first community service initiative, he had no mentors or adults who supported him. In his Community Center, he described the workers there as jailers who did not allow them to talk freely or express their views. Participant 1 acknowledged that his first community service initiative was the first time he had adult mentors who continued to support him until the time of the interview. He said:

After my community service initiative, I got to be supported by Mentor X. Even after I finished my community service initiative, Mentor X continued to mentor me and provided me with other training and work opportunities in the organization that led the youth program. I also got to be supported by another two mentors within the organization, who provided me with significant support and guidance. One of them considered me like his younger brother and always provided me with advice and guidance.

Participant 1 shared that although he had mentors who supported him during and after his community service initiative, other adults maltreated him and made him withdraw from community service activism and from even basic activities he used to do as a young person. He said that he worked in different community service initiatives and activities after 2015 until he was excluded from the community center where he was

enrolled. Some of the decision makers did not agree with his way of work because he advocated for child-rights programming. He argued “[a]dult decision-makers deprived us of our university scholarships, charitable housing, allowance, which prevented us from establishing the organization... if we get the opportunity, we will achieve great things. They destroyed us.”

***Resource mobilization.*** The focus of the interview questions of this section was on whether the participants knew what things were needed to do a community project, and if there were adults who may have had been available to help the participants. Questions also included if and how participants found resources in their community to help them make their community better and if their experience in leading their community service initiatives changed how they mobilize resources. All participants voiced that they did not know of any resources available for community service initiatives in their communities. Their first community service initiatives within the youth program was their first time to know how to find resources.

Participant 5 mentioned, "I didn't know what resources are and how we do a project, we didn't know anything. But after the community service initiatives, I got to know what a community service initiative is and what resources I need to implement an initiative". Participant 3 reported a similar perspective saying, "I had no idea what resources available for youth. The community service initiative I led was my first experience. Resources have been limited in my community.”

Similarly, Participant 2 said, "We didn't know of any resources, but after the community service initiative experience, I learned a lot. I now know where to get resources and support to work on community service initiatives. The training I received as part of my first community service initiative made me realize how to work on a project idea and market it for funding. The more I worked on community service initiatives, the more I get to learn where to go for support. I gained experience with the many initiatives I implemented."

Participant 1 also worked on other community service initiatives after his first experience in 2015 and said that he did not know what resources were available for community services. He said:

I got to know about resources for community service initiatives after my first community service initiative. I was then enrolled in another child's right program where I learned more about community projects and resources available when working with organizations (civil society organizations). It was an extraordinarily strong experience and a paradigm shift for me. I mean, we were receiving resources from the organization and improved our projects ... and we worked on media campaigns and press conferences. We worked on flashes that we published on social media. After that experience, we felt that there was nothing that could stop us. We had determination and ambition because we were doing great things for the community.

**Behavioral component.** This component consists of leadership behavior, community engagement, and school engagement (Zimmerman 1995), see Figure.

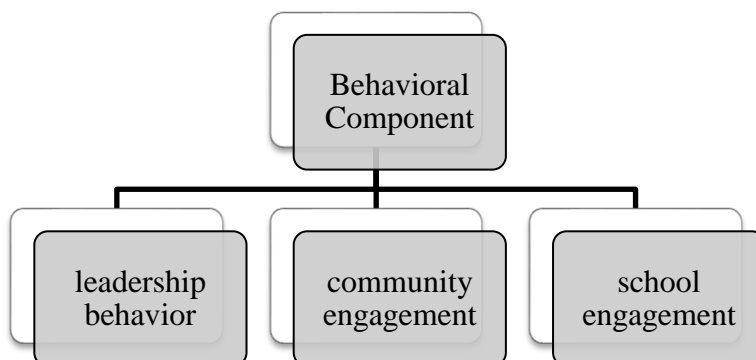


Figure 5. Behavioral component.

**Leadership behavior.** The interview questions for the leadership behavior included how often the participants served as leaders in groups, organized people to get things done and follow the participants' ideas. Participants were also asked to describe any changes that happened to their leadership activity currently and after the experience of designing and leading community service initiatives. Most of the participants expressed that designing and leading their own community service initiatives boosted their leadership skills, and they were able to lead and carry out voluntary and community service initiatives and activities.

In the "leadership efficacy" section, I discuss how participants felt about themselves in leading groups and organizing people to get things done. In this section, leadership behavior, I discuss some of the leadership experiences that the participants had due to their first community service initiatives. Participants 3 and 5 shared that they did not play a leadership role in their community service initiatives or after. Participant 1

reported minimal leadership activities prior to his first community service initiative. However, after his first community service initiative, he understood his rights and responsibilities. He learned about leadership and essential life skills and how to design and lead community service initiatives. The success of his first community service initiative, along with all the knowledge and skills he learned from the experience, motivated him to initiate new activities in his community.

After attending some child rights trainings and with the help of one of the youth program mentors, he led the introduction of the first code of conduct and student charter in his community center and school. He also was able to discuss the importance of child rights programming and how beneficial it could be to everyone in the community center. He was able to convince the community center leadership to involve children more in the daily work of operating and managing the community center, saying, "The community center director at the time of introducing the code of conduct was very cooperative and supported the application of the code of conduct. She required all employees to sign the code of conduct, got it posted on the community center's walls, and facilitated the staff's training on the code..."

Participant 1 then shared that things totally changed after a new director took over the management of the community center. This was when the new management started going against him and deprived him of the work opportunity at the center, as described under the "civic efficacy" section. For him, this was one of the leadership experiences he was so proud of. Another leadership initiative that was abandoned before it was even



born is the youth organization that Participant 1 and his friends wanted to establish to support their fellow graduates from the community center. According to him, everything was ready to be established until adult decision-makers prevented them from accessing the resources they needed for the organization establishment.

Participant 2 communicated that his community service initiative, i.e., renovating a house for an old family, was the first time he discovered that he was a leader. He was a team member, but because the team leader thought they would not succeed in the project, he thought otherwise and asked the other members to give him a chance to lead. He led the project, and with the team's help, he succeeded with significant achievements. He continued with leading other community service initiatives, especially the food baskets in Ramadan.

Participant 4 shared that her community service initiative opened the door for her to leadership opportunities. Since her first community service initiative, she has been moving from one opportunity to another, one of which she is a leader of the youth unit in one of the prominent organizations in the city.

***Community engagement.*** Interview questions asked under this section included whether participants had actively participated in neighborhood activities, did volunteer work, encouraged others to do things to improve their neighborhood, and helped people in need in their neighborhood. Participants were also asked to describe their community service initiatives experiences and what kind of community engagement activities or programs they were involved in. Participants were then asked to provide some details on

how these experiences differed before and after their youth program community service initiatives.

*Previous community engagement experiences.* Participants were asked if they had or contributed to any community engagement programs or activities prior to their community service initiative experiences in 2015. All participants expressed that the concepts of community service and community engagement were new to them and that the community service initiatives they designed and managed were their first experience. Despite this collective acknowledgment of not having previous experience, Participant 1 and Participant 2 disclosed that they worked on small activities to help their peers at school and in the neighborhood but did not recognize that this was considered community engagement.

Participant 1 communicated that some of the activities he used to do voluntarily within his community center and school included hygiene campaigns to younger students on handwashing and nail cutting that he used to do directly with students or through the morning school radio. Participant 2's previous community engagement experience was mostly in the neighborhood with minimal activities at school. He disclosed that he participated in cleaning the mosque and the neighborhood and decorating it for Ramadan.

As for the other three participants, Participant 3 shared he had participated in some educational campaigns in the neighborhood, and Participant 5 was trained in first aid at school and had helped with assisting with small accidents few months before his

training in the youth program. Participant 4 shared that she did not have any community engagement prior to their 2015 community service initiatives.

*Community Service initiatives led by adolescents.* Initiatives varied from small to big, from targeting one household to targeting a group of people, from a one-off event to continuous programming. According to a report shared by the nongovernmental organization, examples of community service initiatives that the adolescents, who were enrolled in the youth program in 2015, designed, implemented, and led included washroom renovation, equipping a community center nurse room, supporting internally displaced people (IDPs) with food commodities, elderly family house renovation, local mosque renovation, providing grade one students with schoolbooks, cleaning campaigns for neighborhoods, breakfast meals for traffic police officers and street cleaning workers, school cleaning campaigns, entertainment programs for children from a cancer center, providing schools with first aid kits, planting trees in the city's orphanage's yard, establishing a library in a community center, and establishing a solar system for power in a community center. In this section, I will share some of the community service initiatives that participants in my study, designed, led, and implemented.

Participant 1 considered his first community service initiative as a turning point that contributed to the person he is now. His first community service initiative was a small health care isolation room inside his community center. As part of his situational analysis, he noticed that when some students leave the community center for family visits, they come back with some infectious skin diseases, such as smallpox. Participant 1

communicated that he started the idea with his team to establish a health care isolation room. The purpose of this room was to isolate sick students with these contagious diseases until it was safe for them to be with others.

The room was abandoned and was not used for years. We removed all dumps from the room and cleaned, renovated, and equipped the room and made it ready to receive patients. The capacity of the room was 10 cases. After a couple of years, we got more funds, and we added another three rooms, which are all now functioning as a health care center within the community center with a capacity of 40 cases. Some other adolescents and I got trained on first aid and formed a small health team who supported other children with first aid.

According to a report shared by the nongovernment organization, Participant 1 and his team were able to establish the room with curtains, beds, sheets, and blankets. According to the report, the adolescents were able to make the room well-equipped and



*Figure 6.* Health care room.

suitable to receive patients. Figure 6 contains pictures that shows the health care unit before and after Participant 1 and his team's initiative. Using the same community engagement precode, I used this set of photos to supplement what Participant 1 shared

that there was a considerable change to the abandoned room. Participant 3's community service initiative was different, but the fundraising approach was similar. Participant 3's project was providing wheelchairs to some people with movement disabilities.

The people we supported with wheelchairs were overwhelmed with joy and happiness. They had been requesting wheelchairs, but nobody responded for years. We started by discussing the initiative with the General Administration of Persons with Disabilities on how to implement the project. They were responsive and referred us to the distribution department, who provided us with lists of people with disabilities who needed wheelchairs. We knocked on many doors of businesses and stores until we collected enough money to buy 25 wheelchairs.

Participant 5's initiative was establishing a solar system in his community center as electricity was a major challenge in the city. According to a report shared by the nongovernmental organization, because of the deficiency of electricity in the city, the halls and washrooms of Participant 5's community center were permanently unlit.



Thus, Participant 5, with his team, decided to equip these halls and washrooms with light. They developed a budget for the materials and equipment they needed for their project and searched for donors. They received funding and purchased ceiling lamps and a solar system as a power source. They then installed the equipment and lamps and lit all

*Figure 7. Establishing solar system.*

the halls and washrooms of the orphanage. Figure 7 shows how big the solar system is; it provided light to the whole center. Participant 5 mentioned, “[w]e went out the community center to look for donations from businesses and electronics stores. We went with a plan and documents to support our fundraising campaign. People were responsive and funded our project.”

Participant 4 worked in two projects that targeted outside beneficiaries: students and children from different centers. Participant 4 said, “I learned the basics of how to start a project, how to design, how to talk, how to deal with others... After the training workshop, we implemented two projects. A recreational celebration in the park for children who are orphans, living with cancer or with disabilities.” According to the report that the nongovernmental organization shared, they held a bake sale during the celebration and donated the revenue for a cancer center. It was stated in the report that Participant 4 and her team were able make the children in the cancer center happy by sharing toys and donating money.

As stated by the same report, Participant 4 and her team worked on another project to distribute first aid kits. The report stated that many schools in the city lack the basic needs of an ordinary school, one is the lack of the materials needed for first aid. Therefore, Participant 4 and her team collected funds to purchase three first aid kits and sent them to three schools. The report also mentioned that first aid training was provided by a certified doctor to the student health care committees in the three schools that received the kits.

Participant 2 worked in a community service initiative that supported a family headed by an old woman with the renovation and maintenance of their house. According to a report shared by the nongovernmental organization, Participant 2 and his team were able to renovate the family's house by cleaning, fixing, repairing, painting, and supplementing the house with basic equipment. This is presented in



Figure 8, which contains before and after pictures of the project that show the significant changes the participant and his team made to the house. Participant 2 disclosed similar description of his initiative in the interview, saying

We chose to fix that house because we thought the family was the most in need of this assistance. After all, the mother was old with two children with mental health illness and another young man without a job. We went to philanthropists who helped us with the funds. We followed our project plan, repaired, and painted the house, fixed the electricity and water, and provided a water tank, and with the remaining money, we bought house items for the family.

*Continuity of community service initiatives.* Only three of the five participants currently implement community service initiatives. The community service initiatives

they implemented in 2015 were the start of other new initiatives that the three participants led to help communities and people in need. Participant 4 shared that she continued working in community service, starting as a volunteer in one of the city's biggest women organizations. Later she was selected as the secretary of the secretary-general of the organization. She also volunteered in two other organizations: a youth union and a women protection and child rights organization. She shared that her first community service initiative opened the door to other opportunities that led to her current career. A recent project she led a few months before the interview was opening a shelter house for abused women's care and rehabilitation.

Participant 2 reported different types of community service activities he has been doing since his first community service initiative. Examples of these community service initiatives include providing cooking gas to needy families and working on bake sales for fundraising to support the orphanage and elderly long-term care center in their community. They also renovated a house of an internally displaced family and provided them with furniture. Participant 2 shared that he also works every Ramadan on food baskets and distributing them among low-income families.

Participant 1 shared an initiative he led with his friends saying, "my friends and I visited a juvenile center and carried out an open day with the children there. We spent the day with them full of games and entertaining activities." He recently also participated in educational campaigns to raise awareness of vaccines' importance and how to prevent currently widespread diseases such as Cholera and German measles. Participant 1 also



shared that on the same day of the interview, he would join an awareness-raising campaign to educate the community on COVID-19.

***School engagement.*** The interview questions I asked under this section included whether the participants actively participated in school activities, did volunteer activities, encouraged others to do things to help improve their school, help people in school who were in need. Participants were then asked to provide details. Most of the answers were already covered as part of the questions under the "civic efficacy" and "community engagement" sections as most of their experiences prior to the community service initiatives program were within the school. Therefore, in this section, I summarize the engagement experiences that participants had at school.

Participants 4 and 5 mentioned that their school engagement was minimal with a focus on the school morning radio. Participant 5 shared that he became a bit more active after his community service initiative as he joined the media group in his school. As a member, he contributed to the planning and organization of school celebrations.

Participant 3 contributed to school voluntary activities as well, such as school cleaning and planting, and educational campaigns. Participant 1 was active in voluntary school activities to support other students before and after his community service initiative.

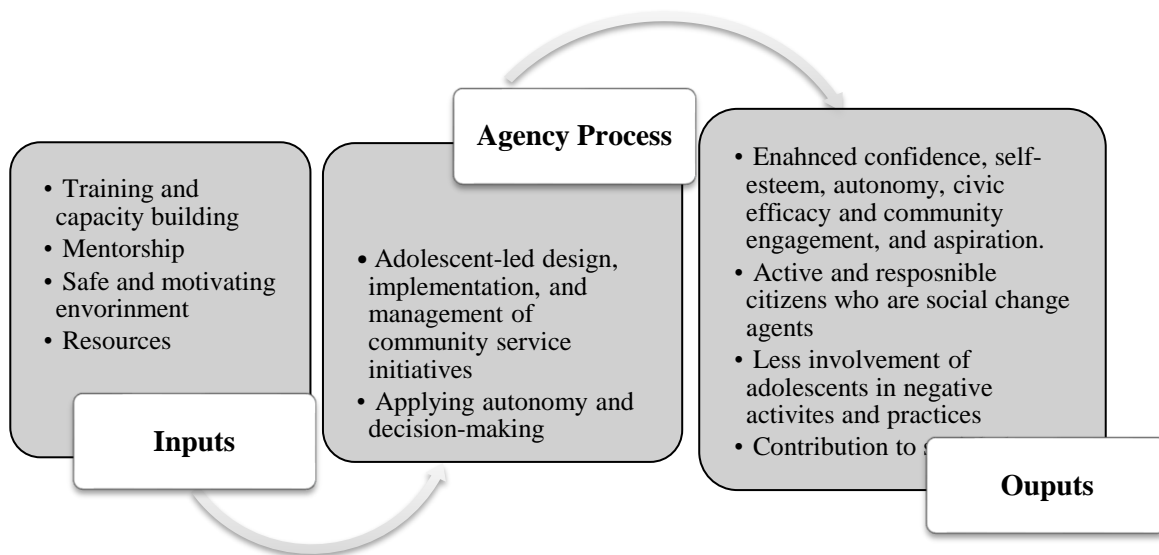
Before the experience, he contributed to self-hygiene campaigns to his fellow school students for nail cutting and hand washing. After his experience, he initiated the first code of conduct that used in both the community center and the school, which was widely used in the school and signed and applied by most of the teachers and workers. He also

initiated a health care group who were then trained to provide initial first aid. It is worth mentioning that the other participants, who were active after the community service initiatives, worked in initiatives outside their schools.

### **Study Findings**

The results across the precodes showed a trend on a process that the participants went through resulting in a model of inputs, agency process, and outputs that summarizes the agency experience of adolescents in designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives, as presented in Figure 9. The trainings, mentoring, the positive and motivating environment, and the resources were important *inputs* that facilitated the agency process. The *agency process* included the activity of adolescents of designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives with autonomy and authority to make decisions.

The *outputs* of the agency experience are the outcomes of the agency process. The benefits the adolescents gained out of the agency process include increased confidence, self-esteem, autonomy, civic efficacy and community engagement, and aspiration. Outputs also included the feeling of being active and responsible citizens who are social change agents. Furthermore, outputs also included that adolescents are engaged in meaningful agency experiences that minimize the engagement of adolescents in harmful activities and practices, such as participating in armed conflicts and the worse forms of labors and early marriage.



*Figure. 9.* Child agency model.

Moreover, the results analysis of the precodes led to five themes: (a) positive impacts on adolescents and their communities as a result of the agency experience presented in the community service initiatives they designed, implemented, and led, evidencing that adolescents are competent active citizens who are capable of contributing to social change; b) adult mentorship and support are key in the development and empowerment of adolescents; c) deficiencies within the education system and youth programs; d) community lack of awareness and understanding of children's right to participation, creating negative impact on adolescents; e) secondary negative consequences of child agency experience on adolescents. In this section, brief description is provided for each finding, but findings discussion in comparison with the literature is provided in chapter 5.

**Positive impacts on adolescents and their communities.** Participants reported positive impacts as a result of the agency experience presented in the community service

initiatives they designed, implemented, and led, evidencing that adolescents are competent active citizens who are capable of contributing to social change.

All participants expressed that the youth program community service initiatives experience they had presented a positive shift and was an added value to their personal development and skills. Participant 4, for example, mentioned that she was shy and introvert but after the training and her first community service initiative, she started to be more open and extrovert. This shift helped her engage in more community service opportunities with big organizations in the city. Participant 1 also expressed that the community service initiative presented a radical change in his life several times during the interview. He justified that by giving examples on how he changed after he knew about his rights and responsibilities and how to advocate for them.

Participant 3 expressed that “I personally benefited from project management, how to implement and lead projects on the ground, and what society requires in developing youth. The experience, frankly, was very excellent. It impacted me significantly on my way of communicating with others, how to look at the society and the future, how to apply these charitable actions, and how to get others to support us in such activities.” Participant 5 was emotionally overwhelmed when he shared how he was impacted by the community service initiative, saying, “I felt emotional relief and positive impact. I was so happy when my group and I implemented our project and succeeded in contributing to making the residents of the community center happy by providing light to the center. I felt so positive and wanted to give more.” Likewise, Participant 4 expressed

that it was her first experience and that it was an eye-opener for her, saying: “[I] did not understand, but through the training and practical implementation of my community service initiative, I learned the basics of how to start an initiative, how to design, how to talk, and how to deal with others.”

**Adult mentorship and support.** Adult mentorship was a common theme highlighted by all participants. Most participants indicated that one of the main reasons for the success with their community service initiatives was the program mentors, who provided them with training, guidance, and encouragement. For Participant 4, the mentors helped break her timidity and shyness and encouraged her to be open and active. Participant 1 owed the change in his personality to his mentors who provided him with learning opportunities and guidance beyond the youth program. All these examples show that adults play key role in the development and empowerment of adolescents and how adult mentorship and support is needed in the child agency process.

**Deficiencies within the education system.** All participants shared that they had their community service initiatives when they were students in middle or high schools. They were adolescents between the age 13 to 17 years when they had their first community service initiatives as part of the youth program. Although the participants came from four different geographies in Yemen, all of the them shared that the community service initiatives was their first time to know what a community service and civic engagement are, to get trained in essential life skills and project design and management, and to live the experience of designing and leading their own initiatives.

The fact that all participants shared that the training, mentorship, and community service initiatives that they had as part of the youth program were their first experience, even for those who were in high school, shows that there is a lack of adolescents' capacity building and empowerment programs and the inclusion of civic and community engagement education in the curriculum within the education system in Yemen.

**Community lack of awareness of children's right to participation.** A common theme across all precodes was the lack of awareness on children's rights in the community and among the adolescents themselves. The participants expressed that prior to their first community service initiatives, they did not know what community service initiatives were, and they were not confident that they would be able to succeed in their projects. One of the participants, for example, mentioned that he did not even know about the terms "leadership," "self-esteem," or "community services." Moreover, there is a lack of awareness among adolescents of their own skills and competencies. For example, two participants shared that they did not have any leadership skills, but all the examples they shared prior to their community services initiatives were activities where they were effectively leading others.

Another form of lack of awareness of child participation and agency is within the community itself. This lack of awareness creates challenges to child participation and agency as reported by most of the participants. Adults with limited awareness of children's right to participation can be obstructive as shared by Participant 2, who expressed that distrust from adults was a challenge saying, "with diligence and

perseverance, we succeeded despite the many difficulties that we went through, including the security situation, lack of trust from some of the institutions we worked with. There was also sometimes social resistance with fear from such community service activities.” Lack of awareness can cause harm and damage, which can be unintentional outcome of social agency experiences, similar to what happened to Participant 1 who lost confidence and dropped out of school because of maltreatment from adults who did not favor his community service.

**Secondary negative consequences of child agency.** Participant 1's experience was different from other participants as he expressed that he was proud of all the work he achieved so far, but he felt that his community service activism led to negative consequences as well. When Participant 1 talked about his community service work, he emotionally said:

I wish community service work can be all year long. I wish I could provide community service all the time. I am trying my best, but current circumstances are against us. There are no opportunities. My friends and I wanted to establish a small youth organization to support our fellow alumni of the community center I was enrolled in. Most of these graduates get abandoned in the society because of the lack of support and resources in the community for such vulnerable group. We tried to establish a youth organization, but adult decision-makers deprived us of our university scholarships, charitable housing, allowance, which prevented us

from establishing the organization... if we get the opportunity, we will achieve great things. They destroyed us.

The examples that Participant 1 disclosed during the interview about adults showed how some adults could be great supporters and mentors, whereas others can be a source of depression. Despite the projects that Participant 1 has implemented, he stopped volunteering recently due to the oppression he and his friends have been receiving from adults, which has increased recently due to the war.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explained the setting of my study. Due to the security situation of Yemen as well as COVID outbreaks and travel restrictions, I had to conduct all interviews virtually with challenges with Internet connectivity and time difference between Yemen and Canada. I also explained the demographics of my study participants, who were five youths with ages ranging from 18 to 22 years from four different governorates in Yemen. The age of the participants when they implemented their community service initiatives ranged between 14 and 17. Three of the participants are university students; one just graduated from high school and now working; one will start university next year.

I additionally discussed how I recruited my participants through a flyer that was distributed by the organization that led the youth program. Those who reached out with interest to participate in the study, signed a consent form and were interviewed. I then



discussed how interviews were transcribed, coded under empowerment theory categories and subcategories, which I used as my precodes for data analysis and results.

Finally, I discussed the evidence of trustworthiness in relation to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of my study and presented the results related to my research question based on the precodes that were derived from empowerment theory's three components. I also presented the findings based on themes identified across the results of the precodes. The highlight of the findings is the child agency model, which demonstrates the components of agency based on the participants' experiences of designing and implementing community service initiatives i.e. agency inputs, process, and outputs.

In chapter 5, I present the interpretation of my study findings and discuss how the findings confirm, expand, and contradict with the existing literature on child participation and agency. I also discuss the limitations and recommendations of my study. Finally, I discuss the implications of my study for positive social change at different levels individual, organizational, societal, scholarly, and theoretical.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the experiences of adolescents, aged 13 to 17 years, in Yemen. The study was about their experiences as adolescents in a youth program in designing, leading, and implementing community service initiatives, and how these experiences contributed to their development after the program, both as adolescents and now as adults (at least age 18 years).

Recent research (Dixon et al., 2019; Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2018) shows how child participation leads to empowerment, but I did not find research on child participation in Yemen and in emergency contexts. Therefore, I aimed to contribute to the literature on child participation by inquiring about child participation and agency in Yemen, which has been at war since 2015 (UNICEF, 2019).

Empowerment theory guided the study. The three components of empowerment theory—as established by Zimmerman (1995) and detailed in Zimmerman et al. (2018)—were used as pre-codes for data analysis and results: (a) intrapersonal component (leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, self-esteem), (b) interactional component (adult mentorship, adult resources, resource mobilization), and (c) behavioral component (leadership behavior, community engagement, school engagement). The youth empowerment pre- and post-questionnaires (Zimmerman et al., 2018) guided the interview questions.

To draw cross-case conclusions, I used Yin's (2003) multiple case study process, starting with the individual interviews and then analyzing each interview as a separate

case, to draw cross-case conclusions. I also used archival photography to support the interviews and the results of the study. Other data sources included a report and publications on the adolescents' agency experiences of designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives.

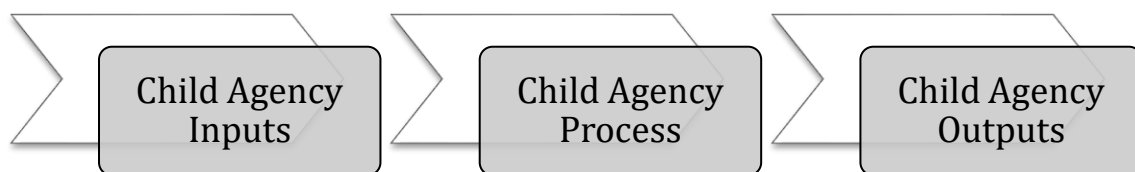
The main result of the study is the child agency model, which shows the inputs, process, and outputs for the adolescents' agency experiences. The study findings are centered around the inputs and outputs of the child agency experience, as demonstrated by the results of the data analysis. The findings of the study showed that (a) positive impacts on adolescents and their communities as a result of the agency experience as presented in the community service initiatives they designed, implemented. These impacts showed that adolescents are competent active citizens who are capable of contributing to social change; (b) adult mentorship and support are key in the development and empowerment of adolescents; (c) there are deficiencies within the education system and youth programs; (d) a community's lack of awareness and understanding of children's right to participation create negative impacts on adolescents; and (e) there could be secondary negative consequences of child agency experience on adolescents. In this chapter, I discuss the findings in relation to the existing literature and show how they confirm, contradict, and expand on the literature. I also discuss the study's limitations, recommendations, and implications.

## Interpretation of the Findings

I use the results to explain whether the findings confirm, disconfirm, or expand current knowledge, with each case providing examples from the literature review in Chapter 2.

### Child Agency Model

The main result of the study was the child agency model, which summarizes the process of the adolescents' child agency experience in designing, leading, and implementing community service initiatives (see Figure 10). Figure 8 in Chapter 4 provides details and examples under child agency inputs, process, and outputs as derived from the participants' agency experience in designing and leading community service initiatives. The model can constitute a basis for other child agency initiatives that aim to empower children and young people.



*Figure 10.* Child agency model-brief graph

For a meaningful agency experience, there need to be *inputs* that include encouraging adult mentors, capacity building, a caring and motivating environment, and proper resources. The *agency process* refers to the activity the children are engaged in implementing. The more the children are given autonomy and authority to make decisions, the more meaningful the child agency is. Child agency *outputs* vary according

to the agency inputs and process. In this study, the outputs included enhanced confidence, self-esteem, aspirations, and positive social change in communities. In the following sections, I discuss the five findings of the study in comparison to the literature review.

### **Positive Agency Experience With Impact on Adolescents and their Community**

All participants described their community service initiatives as a positive experience that contributed to their development and empowerment. An important *output* as a result of the agency process includes the positive social changes to the benefiting communities and groups due to the adolescents' social change contribution. In this section, the focus of the interpretation of findings is on the adolescents' agency *outputs* presented on the impact of the agency on adolescents and their community.

**Impact of agency on adolescents.** Participants expressed how impactful the experience of designing and leading community service initiatives was to them, and how the experience led to a radical change in their lives.

**Active citizens.** The experience of community service brought a new insight into how effective and active citizens adolescents could be, unlike how adults and the broader community perceive them as passive listeners at home and in school. This was an impact that all participants expressed. As supported by Smith (2016), the view of adults that children are passive objects leads to ignoring their right to participation, thereby reducing their resilience and agency (Smith, 2016). The resiliency and agency of the participants were significantly increased because they were given the chance to design and lead their own projects.

Their community service initiatives were the first time the participants became aware that they could serve the community and contribute to social change. As shared by one of the participants, he felt unsure and nervous when he started working on his first community service initiatives. However, after the success of his initiative, he knew that he had the capacity to work on other projects. His achievement in his first initiative was the motive for him to continue serving his community.

Through training, adult mentorship, and self-determination in designing, implementing, and leading their community service initiatives, participants reported increased agency, sense of achievement, and self-satisfaction. Participants also expressed enhanced self-esteem and self-recognition as described by one of the participants “after helping those people, I felt a big difference in my self-esteem. I felt that I was a part of the society, being able to help and give as much as I can. Watching how happy those we helped were meant a lot to me. This experience increased my positivity and confidence.” This aligns with what Sharp (2014) indicated in his study, that the sense of being an agent among adolescents can be supported through positive interpersonal relationships, the structural context, and their views and emotional states. Agency is linked to hope, self-determination, empowerment, initiative, and self-efficacy. (Sharp, 2014), which are required for self-development as well as community development at large (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013).

*A gate to other professional and learning opportunities.* The focus of most of the studies highlighted in chapter 2 was to explore children’s agency experiences at the time

of their occurrences. I did not see a study that measured the impact of these agency experiences in the long run. Examples include Vanner's (2014) study, in which she examined the level and nature of children's participation in Save the Children's school health and nutrition (SHN) project in El Salvador, Zimmerman et al.'s (2018) evaluation study of the Youth Empowerment Solution (YES) program, Murman et al.'s (2014) evaluation of the Let's Erase the Stigma (LETS) program, and Marsh et al.'s (2017) study, in which they examined the extent to which young people act as change agents. All these studies either examined or explored the impact of child agency in the short run, but my study explored both in the short and long run.

My study targeted adults who had child agency experiences when they were adolescents. I had a chance to explore how the child agency experience of designing and leading community service initiatives contributed to the participants today as adults. The following examples illustrate how the child agency experiences during the participants' adolescence contributed to professional and learning opportunities they are still enjoying now as adults.

The community service initiatives experience helped the participants gain new skills in designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives and get exposed to the outside world beyond their school bubble. They also gained other life and social skills such as critical thinking, leadership, communications, and teamwork. The experience opened the door for other opportunities that continued until and beyond the time of this study. For Participant 4, for example, her experience was an entry point to

her current career opportunity. She works now in one of the civil society organizations in the city and got the opportunity to lead one of the difficult projects saying:

Since the first community service initiative I led with my friends in 2015, I now feel better because I am able to lead since I held different roles in my current work position. A recent example is a project I led to open a shelter house for abused women. I led the project from start to end to open the shelter for women's care and rehabilitation.

The community service initiative experience also led to other opportunities to one of the participants. He gained the trust of donors who continued to provide him with donations until the time of the interview. His first community service initiative was the start to a continuous community service work that the participant has been doing and will continue to do. Another example is a participant whose community service initiative experience was the gate to other learning and working opportunities. He was enrolled in child rights projects that enhanced his knowledge in children's rights.

***Self-esteem and leadership.*** Participants shared that their self-esteem, which was either non-existent or negligible prior to their community service experience, was significantly enhanced by the various trainings, resources, mentoring, and the practical approach of self-led designing and implementing of community service initiatives. Participants realized that they had the capability to design and lead community service initiatives, which they thought they were not able to prior to their community service initiatives as described by one of the participants "I felt more confident after



implementing the project. I felt so positive, happy, and proud of myself because I was able to implement a community service project and succeeded. I was able to serve others.” Torres-Harding, Baber, Hilvers, Hobbs, and Maly (2018) stated a similar finding when they studied social activism projects in the classroom.

As a result of the children’s participation in these activism projects, the participating children were able to take actions that positively impacted them and their community (Torres-Harding et al., 2018). Moreover, these actions and activities have the potential to nurture self-efficacy, civic engagement, and positive youth development (Torres-Harding et al., 2018). Crowley (2015) also stated that through child participation experiences, children benefit by acquiring new skills to take responsibility and contribute to positive change. Similarly, in Zimmerman et al.’s (2018) study of the YES program, they found that the child agency experience helped children gain confidence and take up leadership roles, in which they contributed to their community change alongside with encouraging adults.

My study participants expressed that they had the feeling of self-satisfaction, tranquility, and emotional relief as a result of their success in helping others in need as described by one of the participants: “The feeling I had was indescribable when the beneficiary prayed for my wellness and happiness after my friends and I helped fix their house. That motivated me to continue working on community service initiatives.” This is akin to what Torres-Harding et al. (2018) stated that engaging in activism projects facilitated a sense of community, social connectedness and empowerment among the

participating children. The achievement of helping others boosted the participants' responsibility towards themselves and their communities.

Responsibility was also enhanced by the fact that participants were given the chance to design, implement, and lead their community service initiatives from start to end with minimal support from adults. They were the decision makers of their projects throughout the different phases. Providing adolescents with the opportunity to lead and make decisions helped them become more responsible, which in the short and long term contributed to their development. They still feel the responsibility currently to give and support those in need. The engagement opportunity that some of the participants had when they were adolescents contributed to the positive and responsible adults they are now. For one of them, it was an entry point to her successful career, through which she is contributing to support vulnerable groups, such as women and children; and for another, it was the start of continuous community service projects he does every year.

This finding provides an answer to the questions raised by Adu-Gyamfi (2013) in his study conclusion which included what it actually means to have more self-confidence, what the children have confidence in doing, and what the children think they can accomplish now that they could not do before they got involved in child participation experiences. One of the reasons I targeted adults who were adolescents when they had their agency experience is to learn if and how their experiences during their adolescence influenced them when they were adolescents and now as adults. Most of the participants

confirmed that the confidence, self-esteem, resiliency, and skills they have now started after their community service initiative experiences.

The training, mentorships, and the autonomy they had in designing and leading their community projects increased their confidence and competences, leading to their empowerment and enabling them to continue working on community service and opened the door for career opportunities. These results are similar to the findings of Zimmerman et al.'s (2018) study of the *Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES)*. The YES program is akin to the youth program through which my participants implemented their community services initiatives. Like the youth program, the YES program aims at empowering middle school students to increase positive developmental outcomes and decrease undesired behaviors (Zimmerman et al., 2018). The findings of Zimmerman et al. (2018) showed that those who were more engaged in the YES program reported empowerment with more prosocial outcomes and less antisocial outcomes than those who were less engaged.

**Impact on community.** The community service initiatives the participants implemented in 2015 contributed to social change in their communities as described by the participants as well as through the report from the nongovernmental organization. Initiatives ranged from small to large, from targeting one household to targeting a group of people, from a one-off event to ongoing programming. Although it was their first community service initiatives, the participants chose difficult projects that require experience in planning, coordination, dealing with different stakeholders and

beneficiaries, fundraising, and communication skills. They designed and implemented their projects from A to Z including securing funds from donations.

Some projects were as big as securing 25 wheelchairs that the beneficiaries were grateful for as they had been waiting for the devices for years to help their community integration. Projects were as big as establishing a health care unit from scratch with a current capacity of 40 people. The project ideas were surprising for me as I did not expect adolescents who have not had any previous project design and management to come up with such extraordinary ideas to address community pressing needs.

According to a report from the National Organization, all projects were completed with great success with significant impact on the adolescents themselves as well as the communities and beneficiaries whom they supported. This is similar to the findings of Marsh et al.'s (2017) study in which they examined the extent to which young people act as "change agents" to discourage their peers from smoking. These results emphasized that young people could benefit from the discouragement of their peers to smoke (Marsh et al., 2017). Another example is the peer education and support provided as part of the LETS program (Murman et al., 2014), in which young people work with club advisors to encourage peer-to-peer communication, discussion and community intervention aimed at reducing stigma.

All these studies support my findings in the sense that if adolescents and young people are given the opportunity, are equipped with knowledge, skills, and training, they can contribute significantly to social change, and sometimes can do what adults cannot

do. An example is Participant 2's wheelchairs project, with which he and his friends resolved a pressing need that had been unaddressed by the related authority for years. The lack of wheelchairs negatively impacted the community integration of the people who had disability. The beneficiaries who received the wheelchairs were grateful to the adolescent telling them that they solved their problem that they had had for years. Participant 3 and his team were able to solve this problem as described by him: "The people we supported with wheelchairs were overwhelmed with joy and happiness. They had been requesting wheelchairs, but nobody responded for years... We knocked on many doors of businesses and stores until we collected enough money to buy 25 wheelchairs."

Participant 1's initiative was to introduce the code of conduct into his community center. This center is mandated to serve children and had been operating for years without a code of conduct. Participant 1 at the age of 17 was able to introduce the first code conduct in the center. With the help of his mentor and the training he received, he was able to convince the center leadership of the importance of the code of conduct and applying children's rights, especially child participation. The management was understanding and saw the value of the materials and knowledge the Participant brought and made all employees sign the code conduct and engaged children more on the management and operation of the center.

The significant change to the community center due to applying the code of conduct and activating child participation only happened because the Participant was able

to convince the leadership with the added value of the code of conduct and in return the management was understanding and supportive. This aligns with what Johnson (2017) stated about the changes that happen due to children's participation in participatory action research. Changes do not include increasing interest and self-confidence but also a change in employees' attitudes toward the importance of children's standpoints (Johnson, 2017). This shows that adolescents can be active social change agents if they are given the opportunity. This is akin to the argument presented by one of the studied children in the Government of Yemen's report to the World Fit for Children (Government of Yemen, 2006) where he argued, "young people may be much better able to help their country than adults. But you have to give us the chance" (Government of Yemen, 2006, p. 12). Some of my study participants continued to lead and implement initiatives to the present and continued to contribute to the welfare of their communities. Examples are the food baskets that are provided to those in needs seasonally every year and the women rehabilitation center that one of the participants led its establishment.

All these community service initiatives led by participants when they were adolescents demonstrate how agency experiences lead to the development of both the young people and their communities. This aligns with what Johnson (2017) stated in his article that when children and young people participate in meaningful participatory action research, positive transformation in the lives of children and young people as well as their communities can happen. Similarly, Zimmerman et al.'s (2018) study found that the

agency experience of children as part of the YES program helped them gain confidence and take up leadership roles, in which they contributed to their community change.

### **Lack of Awareness on the Rights of the Child to Participation and Agency**

As participants were describing their community service initiatives, it was evident that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of children's right to participation and agency among adults, the community, and the adolescents themselves. Community service was a new concept to the participating adolescents, let alone other community members. This lack of awareness mirrors what Vanner (2014) found in her study that neither students nor teachers stated that the rights of children are known as a set of legal and moral values to be upheld by the El Salvador government.

Additionally, this lack of awareness on children's capacity and right to participation as well as the mistrust and social resistance created some challenges to the adolescents during the implementation of their community service initiatives. One of the participants said, "there was a perception in the community that youth are not capable of implementing and leading projects, but we had proven that we could succeed despite the resources being almost non-existent." The limited awareness on child participation and agency in the different settings is considered a challenge to child participation (Collins, 2017; Forde et al., 2017; Vanner, 2014).

In her study, in which she examined the level and nature of children's participation in Save the Children's school health and nutrition (SHN) project in El Salvador, Vanner (2014) found that children's participation was limited due to the lack of

awareness among teachers and students about children's participation as a right.

Children's participation can be more profound if there is an understanding of children's rights (Vanner, 2014). For child agency to happen, adults need to treat children and young people as agents of change in a participatory democracy in a broader cultural and political setting (Johnson, 2017).

### **Adult Mentorship**

A similarity among three out of the five participants is that their adult mentorship was limited to their direct family members. None of them had an adult mentor from school, neighborhood, religious places, or the community. One of the other two had the principal of his community center as his mentor, whereas, the fifth participant did not have any mentors prior to his first community service initiative. Both these participants spent most of their time in their community centers. The word 'mentor' was not a word that the five participants were familiar with, which shows the lack of mentorship activities or education programs in different settings.

Most of the participants expressed that they owed their success to the training, mentorship, and support to the trainers and mentors. This shows that young people are in need of adult mentors. Most of the participants had adult support from related families prior to their community service initiatives but the guidance they received from qualified trainers and mentors helped them get exposed to the outside world beyond their families and schools and made them realize their capabilities, interests, and opportunities.



As expressed by the participants, adults played key roles in their success and aspiration in their community service initiatives. Therefore, for young people to be active social change agents, they need to get the proper support and mentorships as well as motivation and encouragement from adults. This mirrors what Adu-Gyamfi (2013) claimed that the effectiveness of any child participation activity depends primarily on the role of adults who can encourage or prevent children and youth participation. Adults also need to adapt to accommodate young people so they can fully engage in the public sector (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). In addition, building dialogue and trust and creating a participatory environment are important prerequisites for transformational change centered on children and youth as stated by Chou et al. (2015). Adults' support was also highlighted in Zimmerman et al.'s (2018) study, in which they stated that the experience of children's agency helped them gain confidence and take on leadership roles in which they, along with supportive adults, contributed to changes in their community.

Adults can also play a negative role as well if they lack the awareness on child rights, as what happened to Participant 1 who withdrew from community engagement because of adults' oppression. Participant 1 showed how adults played two extreme roles in his life. He described the workers at his community center as jailers who did not allow them to talk freely or express their views. On the other hand, through his community service initiatives, Participant 1's mentors supported him and provided him with learning opportunities that let him see the world differently and contribute to social change. He was then supported by the new leadership of the community center that appreciated the

child rights perspective and tools he brought to the center. The center leadership applied the code of conduct that Participant 1 introduced for the first time in the center.

A few years later, the center leadership changed, and the new director had a different perspective than what was applied in the center. That was the start of the demotivation and exclusion of Participant 1 that led him to withdraw and drop school. Therefore, adults play a key role in the development and wellbeing of adolescents and how their personality is shaped. Some adults can contribute to forming confident, active, and responsible future adults as what happened in most of the cases of the participants, whereas other adults can contribute to creating defeated children who could become a burden on the society.

### **Deficiency in the Education System and Programs**

While participants came from four different regions in the country in Yemen, they shared that their community service initiatives were the first time they had ever learned about community service and civic engagement. It was their first time to design and lead initiatives. It indicates a lack of capacity building programs that target children and young people and the inclusion of civic and community engagement education in the curricula and education system in Yemen. The reality of the deficient educational system was presented in shadow reports to the United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child, such as the report submitted by Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (2005), which reiterated that the educational system in Yemen is an obstacle in the way of obtaining the

children's right to participation because it incorporates no infrastructure to promote the child's right to participation and free expression of views.

All the participants had the desire to contribute to social change but did not know how. The community service initiative program was their first experience where they had the opportunity to discover their abilities and give something back to their communities. This shows a limitation in capacity building and empowerment programs provided to adolescents at school. The education system focuses on the academic side and lacks programs that provides student with practical learning opportunities that includes community engagement and civic efficacy education, essential life skills, and designing and implementing community service initiatives.

The lacking curricula is similar to what Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis's (2014) found on their analysis of the curricula in Australia and Sweden, which dealt with environmental, social, and cognitive content, but the political aspects of people development such as children as active citizens and political agents were limited or not at all addressed. This showed that children were not recognized in the early childhood curriculum framework as skilled persons or change agents for sustainability (Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis, 2014). The curricula lack the aspect that support children as equal citizens in contributing their voices and actions to civic and public participation (Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis, 2014). Likewise, Percy-Smith and Burns (2013) stated that learning is not collaborative and is not recognized as a two-way system in education but rather a one-way system with adults as educators and children as students.

The fact that the community service initiatives were the participants' first youth engagement experience shows that there are limited youth engagement and empowerment opportunities in the different settings as well such, as, neighborhoods, community centers, and religious places. For all participants, it was their first experience to learn about civic engagement as described by one of the participants: "Previously, I did not know anything about the world of projects and initiatives. I did not understand, but through the training and implementation of my community service initiative, I learned the basics of how to start an initiative, how to design, how to talk, and how to deal with others." According to Percy-Smith and Burns (2013), one of child participation's challenges is the lack of opportunities for children to take action and practice agency. De Winter (1997) argued that it is not sufficient for young people to learn about sustainable development and change opportunities without taking on roles and engaging with community learning and action.

One factor that made the community service initiatives effective is that they were adolescents-led. The uniqueness of the youth program is that it provided adolescents with trainings and mentorship, but the adults did not interfere with any of the stages of the implementation of community service initiatives. The adolescents created the initiative ideas and project proposals based on their need assessments. They then implement and lead the initiatives with minimal support from the trainers and mentors. They were the decision makers throughout the experience. None of the participants shared that they had such a practical experience before, which is evident that the education system is lacking

such important capacity building and empowerment programs that improve adolescents' civic efficacy and social life skills.

### **Negative Consequences of Agency Experiences**

The findings of the study confirmed the current knowledge in the discipline of child participation and agency and reiterated that children are competent citizens who can contribute to social change (Bahou, 2012; Johnson, 2017; Lansdown et al., 2014; Nolas, 2015; Smith, 2016; Vanner, 2014; Zimmerman, 1995). The agency experience of designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives led to a positive impact on the adolescents and their communities, leading to the adolescents' empowerment, which aligns with existing literature (Anyon et al., 2018; Gersch et al., 2014; Johnson, 2017; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Rivera & Santos, 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2018).

However, there are some aspects that adults need to pay attention to while engaging children in agency experiences around protection (Collins, 2017; Segura-April, 2016). In response to Adu-Gyamfi (2013) in his argument that participation does not empower children, my study findings confirms that child agency and participation do empower children. However, circumstance such as lack of awareness and social resistance to change can lead to negative consequences that are not necessarily tied to the agency experience itself but rather to the fact that the community is not prepared for a social change led by children.

Although adolescents' agency positively impacts the adolescents, it could involve secondary negative consequences that might impact adolescents. This negative impact is linked to the level of awareness among adults on children's rights and how they perceive children as passive citizens who need to follow adults. The view of adults that children are passive objects leads to ignoring their right to participation, thereby reducing their resilience and agency (Smith, 2016). The belief that children are passive objects lead to neglecting their participation and privacy rights and thus decreases their resilience and agency. (Smith, 2016).

The more awareness of children's rights among adults, especially those who have the authority to make decisions, the higher the chances of their support and motivation to children and young people. Moreover, the less awareness on children's right among adults, the less their support and assistance to children and young people and may sometimes negatively affect the life and future of the youth involved. This presented in the case of one of the participants who was oppressed by adults in authority due to his activism and social changes activities, which led to depriving him from entitled opportunities and privileges. This experience led him to withdraw from the community and drop out of school.

### **Interpretation of Findings in Context of Empowerment Theory**

The study findings align with and confirm empowerment theory. Zimmerman's (1995) description of the three components of empowerment aligns with the findings of my study and confirms that the use of these categories and subcategories for my data

analysis and result was a good choice. Zimmerman (1995) describes the three components as they “merge to form a picture of a person who believes that he or she has the capability to influence a given context (intrapersonal component) understands how the system works in that context (interactional component), and engages in behaviors to exert control in the context (behavioral component)” (p. 590).

The first finding of the study is that there are positive impacts on adolescent and their communities as a result of the agency experience, evidencing that adolescents are competent active citizens who are capable of contributing to social change. According to empowerment theory, empowerment involves processes that contribute to enabling individuals to effectively be active in community change efforts (Zimmerman, 1995), which aligns with the process of the community service initiative experience of the participants. This involved the training, mentoring, and autonomy provided to the adolescents to design and lead their own community projects, thus contributing to the change efforts. All of this contributed to the empowering process, which is the opportunity that was provided to the participants to elevate confidence and skills, exercise control, learn and practice competencies, and make decisions, which are key according to empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2011).

According to the empowerment theory, for adolescents, such processes may be achieved through working in a friendly and caring environment, contributing effectively to the community, and interacting with positive and constructive adults (Zimmerman, 2011). This aligns with the remaining findings of my study: adult mentorship and support

are key in adolescents' development and empowerment, and deficiencies within the education system and youth programs minimize empowerment opportunities to children. Moreover, the lack of awareness in the community on children's right to participation creates a challenge that might hinder the adolescents' progress towards their efforts to contribute to social change.

My study child agency model confirms empowerment theory in terms of processes and outcomes. The model is though organized in a practical way to inform the work of advocates and practitioners in the realm of child participation and agency. The flow of the model was derived from the participants' agency experiences in designing, leading, and implementing community service initiatives. Most of the model's elements mirror the components and sub-components of empowerment theory but organized differently as the focus is more on the flow of child agency experience starting with what *inputs* and *agency process* are required for potential positive *outputs*. The inputs and agency process influence the outputs, aligning with Goossens et al. (2016) who stated that the intervention implementation process can substantially influence the outcomes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The same limitations stated in chapter 1 continued throughout the study with new limitations. The first limitation was that the sample was specific to those who took part in designing and leading community service initiatives as part of the youth program run by a Yemeni nongovernmental organization because it was the only program I found that gives a space for adolescents to have a child agency experience with minimal adults'



intervention and support through designing, implementing, and leading their own community service initiatives. Although many young people reached out with interest to participate in the study, I selected the cohort of 2015 as I did not have any intervention with this group as I left the youth program in 2014. This helped with minimizing the biases and the openness of the participants as all of them did not know who I was.

The second limitation was the security situation in Yemen. The plan for me was to travel to Yemen to conduct the interviews in person. Because of the security situation in Yemen as well as COVID-19 reality, I was not able to travel and had to conduct all interviews virtually. The third limitation was that I could not find academic articles nor governmental reports on child participation in Yemen. Most of the resources I found were on child participation in Yemen were as outdated as 2004 and 2011. I, therefore, depended on reports produced by Save the Children and the International Bureau for Children's Rights (2011), shadow reports submitted to the committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) and a report on child-rearing practices in Yemen by a Yemeni National NGO (2004). Although these reports are outdated, they aligned with the findings of the study.

The fourth limitation is that I am one of the founders of the youth program, run by a Yemeni national nongovernmental organization in 2008 when I was working for the same organization. However, this did not impact the selection of participants as I did not contribute to the youth program since 2014. I targeted the young people who were

enrolled in the Youth program in 2015 as I did not contribute to any activities of that group. The interview was the first time I met with the participants.

COVID-19 was another limitation that impacted my plans to travel to Yemen for in-person interviews. It also impacted the outreach to more participants. Internet connectivity was another major limitation that impacted the interviews. Internet connectivity at the participants' side was a significant challenge. No interview took place in one shot; there were many interruptions. For one of the participants, her internet connection was so weak that we could not have an audio call to conduct the interview. We had to do the interview in several audio recordings because I would ask a question in one recording and the participant would answer at a different time in more than one recording. There were 75 recordings for that interview varying between 15 seconds to two minutes, resulting in a complete interview of around 54 minutes.

### **Recommendations**

Through my study, I have provided insights into child participation and agency in the context of war. The findings of the study suggest that there are positive impacts on adolescents and their communities as a result of the agency experience presented in the community service initiatives they designed, implemented, and led, demonstrating that adolescents are competent active citizens who are capable of contributing to social change. Moreover, adult mentorship and support are required for meaningful child agency and contribute to the development and empowerment of adolescents. Power resides inside everyone; it is more about practicing this power; therefore, children need to

be viewed as powerful agents able to exercise influence (Bradbury-Jones, Isham, and Taylor, 2018).

Findings also demonstrated that there are deficiencies within the education system and youth empowerment programs which limited the learning opportunities for children and youth. There is also a lack of community awareness and understanding of children's right to participation, creating negative impact on adolescents. Finally, child agency experience might lead to secondary negative consequences due social resistance and lack of awareness. Therefore, I recommend the following based on the findings of this study.

First, the findings revealed deficiency within the education system on child empowerment and civic education and engagement in Yemen. Therefore, research is recommended to evaluate the curricula to explore what development, social, and civic aspects are lacking in the curricula. This research needs to also study how the Ministry of Education is currently functioning in areas of child and youth empowerment programs, including curriculum, structures, tools, and resources. Based on the research findings, it is recommended to work on a plan to address gaps to enhance the presence and activation of youth empowerment programming and resources.

Second, the findings also disclosed that the youth program where adolescents practiced agency and designed and led their own community service projects was an effective model that contributed significantly to their empowerment. The focus of my study was on the adolescents' agency experiences, so I did not study the youth program itself. Thus, it is recommended to evaluate the program for evidence-based model that

can be duplicated in other areas to benefit other adolescents and young people. Moreover, it would be beneficial if other empowerment youth programs in the country are studied as well for similarities, differences, and for verifying efficiencies for a potential collective efforts to support the empowerment of children and youth in such difficult time that Yemen is going through.

Third, the lack of awareness in the community of the rights of the child to participation was evident and constructed a challenge that hindered the productivity of the participating adolescents. This aligns with the Concluding Observations on the fourth periodic report of Yemen (UNCRC, 2014); the Committee on the Right of the Child expressed its concerns that children in Yemen are not perceived as right holders. The Committee also expressed its concern about the lack of opportunities for children to have their voices heard in decision-making processes at the policymaking level as well as in the family, school, and community at large.

Therefore, awareness raising campaigns to the community is needed to promote children's right to participation and encourage their meaningful participation and agency. This aligns with the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to the Government of Yemen (UNCRC, 2014), to support programming and awareness raising interventions to promote children's meaningful participation within the family, school, and community. There needs to be a cultural change in the attitudes of adults towards children and young people, and before that can occur, there needs to be

training on participation for adults working with young people, in home, school, and community contexts (Forde et al., 2017).

Forth, the distinctive finding of this study is that there might be secondary negative implications of child agency as what happened to one of the participants who was oppressed by adults and deprived from opportunities and privileges to which he was entitled. There is research that tackled child participation in the context of protection as child participation is required in child protection initiatives (Collins, 2017), but I did not see research that focuses on child protection in the context of child participation and agency programming. Research is needed to study how child protection and the best interest of the child is practiced, monitored, and ensured when engaging children and young people in agency experiences. It is important to study how the “do no harm” principle is applied and ensured when children and young people participate in community engagement programs.

### **Implications**

In my study, I explored the agency experiences of adolescents in designing and leading community service initiatives during war and civil unrest in Yemen. The following illustrate how the findings of my study can contribute to positive social change at the individual, organizational, and societal levels and have scholarly and practice implications.

#### **Positive Social Change**

**Individual- and societal-level implications.** Giving adolescent and young

people the opportunity to have an agency experience where they were practicing autonomy and authority to make decisions result in positive impacts on both the adolescents themselves as well as their communities. Such agency experiences keep young people occupied by meaningful community engagement that empower them and can help minimize the chances that adolescents engage in harmful activities and practices such as participating in armed conflicts, dropping school, early marriage, and engaging in dangerous forms of labor. Although the agency experiences were meant to empower adolescents, an outcome of this empowerment process includes a positive social change to the community as well.

**Practice implications.** The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of adolescents in designing and leading community service initiatives. The findings of the study may inform the practices of the youth program as well as other child participation programs and interventions. The adolescents' experiences of designing and leading community service initiatives might be an effective model to support other young people who are sharing similar contexts. Moreover, the study resulted in a child agency model with inputs, agency process, and outputs based on the youth program, which can be used in other emergency contexts to support and build the capacity of adolescents living in conflict areas.

**Policy implications.** For influencing social policy, scientific research is needed to provide credible evidence on the need for social change (Kelman, 1968). The findings of the study can be used for an evidence-based advocacy to make these empowerment

opportunities accessible for other young people in the same or other communities. The findings will inform the practices of children's rights activists and advocates in their efforts in policy change and educating the public in Yemen. Moreover, the study results and recommendations might inform analysis, planning, and programming of the governmental and nongovernmental organizations as well international organizations and funding agencies working for and with children and young people in Yemen for more effective and evidence-based programming.

The significance of this study lays on the fact that I studied an under-researched phenomenon in the context of war. The generated knowledge can serve as an educational and enlightening resource for enhancing children's situations and for educating communities. With an understanding of children rights, children's participation can be more meaningful and overt (Vanner, 2014) because adults need to support young people to grow critical and creative citizens who can contribute to their development and the progress of democratic communities (Burger, 2019).

**Scholarly implications.** This study contributed to the knowledge and practice of child participation, agency, and empowerment. Through my literature review of articles and reports on the past five years i.e., 2013 through 2019, I found no articles on child participation in emergencies, conflicts, and wars. Therefore, the findings of the study, which targeted adolescents' experiences in Yemen, contributed to the knowledge and literature of child participation by filling the gap of studying the discipline of child participation and agency in contexts of war and emergency. Further, I did not find

scholarly resources on child participation in Yemen to support my literature review. This study helped fill the gap of the lack of scientific research on child participation in Yemen and can serve as a basis for future related studies.

Moreover, the recommendations of the study form a good basis for future research, including evaluating the school education curricula to explore what development, social, and civic aspects are lacking in the curricula and how the Ministry of Education is currently functioning in areas of child and youth empowerment programs, including curriculum, structures, and resources. Additionally, studying and evaluating the youth program itself will help understand the content and strengths and weaknesses for an effective youth empowerment model that can be duplicated in different contexts.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the experiences of adolescents aged 13 to 17 in Yemen who participated in a social agency experience in implementing and leading community service initiatives designed to contribute to the welfare of their communities. All participants described their community service initiatives as a positive experience that contributed to their development and empowerment. Some of them described their community engagement experience as a positive shift as they were able to contribute to social change and to see how their work positively impacted their communities.

Part of the findings was the child agency model that expanded in the empowerment theory and can be used by other child participation, agency, and



empowerment researchers, practitioners, and advocates. The model consists of three components that are needed for positive changes; these are inputs, agency process, and outputs. The trainings, mentoring, the positive and motivating environment, and the resources are the *inputs* that facilitated the agency process. The *agency process* includes the activity of adolescents of designing, implementing, and leading community service initiatives with autonomy and authority to make decisions. The *outputs* of the agency process include the benefits to the community and to the adolescents.

The findings of the study demonstrated a) there are positive impacts on adolescent and their communities as a result of the agency experience, demonstrating that adolescents are competent active citizens who are capable of contributing to social change, b) adult mentorship and support are crucial in the development and empowerment of adolescents, c) there are deficiencies within the education system and youth programs that limit adolescents' empowerment opportunities, d) there is community lack of awareness and understanding of children's right to participation, and e) secondary negative consequences of child agency experience on adolescents due to lack of awareness.

The takeaway of this study is that adolescents are active citizens who have the capability and instincts to contribute to social change. Providing adolescents with effective and proper agency opportunities have a positive impact on both the adolescents and their communities. On the other hand, the lack of awareness, and deficiencies in the education system, including curricula, structures, and resources, minimize the

empowerment opportunities for children and young people. Without these opportunities, youth might go to other alternatives that might be harmful to their safety, development, and wellbeing, such as participating in armed conflicts, early marriage, and dropping school.

Such youth empowerment programs are much needed to support adolescents. However, these programs need to be accompanied by awareness-raising components to educate adults and the community to avoid any negative consequences that might impact adolescents' safety and well-being. More research is needed to understand the gaps in communities, education system, and other settings where child participation need to be practiced. The study child agency model can be used by child participation and agency advocates and practitioners for effective child agency experiences that contribute to adolescents' development and empowerment, in which they exercise their autonomy, competence, and creative solutions to address community problems and pressing needs.

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## Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about the experiences of young people in designing, implementing, and leading community-service initiatives in Yemen. The researcher is inviting young people who designed and led community-service initiatives within the youth program in Sana'a, Ibb, Mukala, and Aden as part of the Youth Program. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by Shaima Alrai, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as one of the establishers of the Youth Program, but this study is separate from that role.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore what is it like for adolescents aged 13 to 18 in Yemen to participate in implementing and leading community service initiatives designed to contribute to the development of their communities. I intend to explore how such community service experiences contribute to the welfare and development of children, if it does at all.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-time interview that will take around 30 to 60 minutes. The questions will be about your community-service initiatives experiences that took place in 2015 as part of the Youth Program.

Here are some sample questions:

- Can you describe your experience in designing and leading community service initiatives as part of the Youth Program in 2015 and how it impacted you and your community?
- Before your experience in leading community-service initiative, how often did you serve as a leader in groups? Organize people to get things done and follow your ideas?

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue and boredom. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

This study will fill the gap of the lack of scientific research on child participation in Yemen and will serve as a basis for future related studies. The results of the study can be used for an evidence-based advocacy to make these empowerment opportunities accessible for other young people in the same or other communities. Further, the findings will inform the practices of children's rights activists and advocates in their efforts in policy change and educating the public in Yemen. The generated knowledge may serve as an educational and enlightening resource for enhancing children's situations and for educating communities.

**Compensation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you will not be compensated or paid for participating in this study.

**Privacy:**

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants will also not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. I will maintain confidentiality of any information you provide. The data will not be used for any purposes other than research. Data will be kept secure by keeping data in a google drive account that has password protection. Moreover, codes will be used instead of names. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions, you may contact the researcher via email at [shaima.alrai@waldenu.edu](mailto:shaima.alrai@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 001-612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is XXX and it expires on XXX.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

### **Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

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## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Case Number/Reference:	Interview Duration:
Date:	Participant Age:
Place:	Participant gender:

Thank you for accepting to participate in my study and for your time to join this interview. The purpose of this study is to explore what's it like for young people in Yemen to participate in implementing and leading community service initiatives designed to contribute to the welfare of their communities. I intend to explore how these experiences contribute to the welfare and development of children.

The interview will take around 60 minutes and will be recorded to be transcribed and analyzed for the study report. Do you accept recording the interview? If yes, you may ask to stop the recording at any point in the interview. Please feel free to ask any questions at any time of the interview. If you do not feel comfortable to answer any question, you may request to skip the question. The participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may stop the interview at any time.

<b>1. Introductory Question:</b> Can you describe your experience in designing and leading community service initiatives as part of the Youth Program in 2015 and how it impacted you and your community?	
<b>Intrapersonal component Questions:</b>	
Leadership efficacy	<p>2. Describe your experience in leading community service initiatives, and how you think you were in terms of leading groups, organizing people to get things done, and getting people to follow your ideas.</p> <p>3. Has your experience with the designing and leading community-service initiatives contributed to these skills? Can you compare between how you were before and after designing and leading your community service initiative?</p> <p>4. How do you see your leadership efficacy in the past three years? Has the community service initiatives experience impacted that? How?</p>

Civic efficacy	<p>5. Before your experience in leading community Service initiatives, how do you describe yourself in terms of your ability to be involved in activities to contribute to positive change to your community and making your community a better place by helping others in need?</p> <p>6. Has your experience in designing and leading community-services initiatives contributed to these skills? Can you compare between how you were before and after designing and leading your community service initiative?</p> <p>7. How do you see your civic efficacy in the past three years since you were last involved in community service initiatives? Has the community service initiatives experience impacted that? How?</p>
Self-esteem	<p>8. Before your experience in leading community service initiatives, how did you feel about your self-esteem? Did you feel positively towards yourself? Did you have much to feel proud of?</p> <p>9. Has your experience in leading community-service initiatives changed that attitude to yourself? If yes or no, why? How?</p> <p>10. How do you see your self-esteem in the past three years since you were last involved in community service initiatives? Has the community service initiatives experience impacted that? How?</p> <p>11. What does it actually mean to have more self-confidence and what do you have confidence in doing?</p>
<b>Interactional Component Questions</b>	
Adult mentorship	<p>12. Before or during or after your experience in leading your community service initiative, did you have an adult mentor in your life that you go to for support? Or someone you go to for advice? Or someone who wants you to do your best? Who is this person, and how did he or she help you?</p>
Resource mobilization	<p>13. Before your experience in leading your community-service initiative, did you know what things were needed to do a community project? And if there were adults who may help you do a community project? Did you find things in your community to help you make your community better?</p> <p>14. Did your experience in leading community-service initiative changed any of these? How?</p>
<b>Behavioral Component Questions</b>	

Leadership behavior	<p>15. Before your experience in leading community-service initiatives, how often did you serve as a leader in groups? Organize people to get things done and follow your ideas?</p> <p>16. Has this changed after your experience in leading your community service initiative? How?</p> <p>17. Has this changed in the past three years since you were last involved in community service initiatives? How? Why?</p>
Community engagement	<p>18. Before your experience in leading community service initiatives, did you actively participate in your neighborhood activities? Do volunteer activities? Encourage others to do things to help improve their neighborhood? Help people in your neighborhood who are in need? Can you provide some details?</p> <p>19. Has any of these changed after your experience in leading your community service initiative? How?</p> <p>20. Has this changed in the past three years since you were last involved in community service initiatives? How? Why?</p>
School engagement	<p>21. Before your experience in leading community service initiatives, did you actively participate in your school activities? Do volunteer activities? Encourage others to do things to help improve their school? Help people in your school who are in need? Can you provide some details?</p> <p>22. Have any of these changed after your experience in leading your community service initiative? How?</p> <p>23. Has this changed in the past three years since you were last involved in community service initiatives? How? Why?</p>
<p><b>Concluding Questions:</b></p> <p>24. Has your experience in designing and leading community service initiatives contributed to the person you are now? How? What impact has the program on you in the past three years since you were last involved in the program if any?</p> <p>25. What do you think you can accomplish now that you think could not do before you got involved in child participation experiences?</p>	

Thank you for your participation in the interview. I appreciate your time in participating in my study.