CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILD-HEADED FAMILIES AT MAHLABATHINI IN KWAZULU NATAL

BY

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partially fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community Work at the University of Zululand

SUPERVISOR: Dr N.H NTOMBELA

JUNE 2009

KWADLANGEZWA

DECLARATION

I, Mlungisi Siphiwo Mthethwa, declare that the work **"Challenges faced by child-headed families at Mahlabathini in KwaZulu Natal"** is my own, and all sources quoted have been acknowledged by complete references.

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M.S. Mthethwa

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late mother Emelda Ntombingani Mthethwa.

ABSTRACT

The changing structures of families and the increase in numbers of child-headed families are progressively becoming noticeable both nationally and internationally. Due to the number of families and parents being affected by HIV/Aids, a growing number of children in South Africa are left without parents who can provide them with basic needs and emotional care and support. As a result older siblings become caregivers to the younger siblings, as extended family are no longer, due to straining social-economic circumstances, able to take these orphans under their care. In order for the silent voices of children from child-headed families in Mahlabathini to be heard, the inquiry aimed at determining what their challenges and coping mechanisms are. In doing so the information may enable educational psychologists to support Site Based Support Teams and schools to enhance their care and supportive strategies to the benefit of learners from child-headed families.

By means of an interpretivist qualitative inquiry, descriptions of these children intentions, beliefs and meaning making were obtained. The data collection methods included questionnaires completed by five learners from child-headed families.

Some of the recommendations discussed included the development of community support centres in order to support learners from child-headed families with after-school care for their younger siblings, meals and recreational activities. Community forums would need to prioritise the safety of their neighbourhoods in order for all children to feel appreciated and safe in their environments. School Based Support Teams will need to be trained in counselling skills and especially in bereavement counselling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. Dr N.H Ntombela, my supervisor who supported me and gave me guidance regarding a road not yet travelled. Thank you for all your support and care in helping me find the way.

2. To my family members.

3. Thank you Prof Moyo for your help with the editing of this document.

4. To all the learners who shared their challenges with me with such enthusiasm and dignity.

5. To the educators and principals who provided me with access to their schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE RIVIEW

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMANDATIONS

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

Children in South Africa may have to live without parental care for a number of reasons, one of which is the death of their parents. South Africans have traditionally had fluid arrangements concerning the care and residence of their children, who move relatively easy among the extended families. Working parents, especially mothers, contribute when they can to the income of the household in which their children are living. Children whose parents have died or disappeared are similarly absorbed into the extended family. These patterns of childcare have been replicated and adapted in urban settings as more people have moved to towns and cities in search of employment.

More recently, the HIV pandemic has contributed increasingly to the number of children living without parental care. South Africans have continued to absorb such children into extended families and communities. However, their capacity to do this is being eroded by a dramatic increase in the number of maternal and double orphans and a reduction in the number of prime-age caregivers, such as aunts and uncles (Foster, 2004:10).

The shortage of employment opportunities in the South African rural areas has grown. It continues unabated to levels that have caused concern and reached uncontrollable proportions in most communities (Lombard, 1992: 7). Due to the unemployment in these communities, it often happens that both parents leave their children in family homes in the rural areas in order to seek jobs (Le Roux, 1993: 158). The resultant absence of one or both parents from home due to work absorption causes shifts in the environment in which children grow and this

1

consequently spawns many other social problems.

Presently, the question is to attempt to study children's problems within their socio-cultural contexts. Children are the future of any country and the impact of parental absence upon them during the formative and critical stages of their lives is a challenge that demands examination.

1.2 Background Information

Mahlabathini is located on the southern boundary of the Zululand District Municipality in north-eastern KwaZulu-Natal. The Mahlabathini area population consists mainly of Zulu people (98.8 %) and the ethnicity and culture of the Zulu community in the rural and tribal areas play an important role in today's educational levels and vocational distribution of women in particular. In the past it was not common practice for young girls to attend school. If they did, it was only to achieve the most basic level of literacy and numeracy (IDP-Ulundi,2006:7).

Nearly half of the area at Mahlabathini consists of sparsely populated commercial farms. A significant number of households in the area are headed by women, who are usually more disadvantaged than men in terms of resources and education. More than half of the population (59%) is younger then 19 years of age, placing pressure on the need for social facilities (IDP-Ulundi, 2006:7).

A significant number of these children will be orphaned owing to the impact of HIV/AIDS and population growth is expected to decline over the next twenty years. According to Garson (2003:3) a study led by the Human Sciences Research Council has shown that at least 12% of the population (27 450 people) is already infected with HIV/AIDS and 400 people

per year could be added to this figure. This will have a severe impact on the need for social and welfare services in the next 10 years.

The rural areas of Mahlabathini are most severely affected by poverty. Unemployment levels are very high with only 6.4% of the total population being formally employed. Every employed person supports 16 unemployed persons of which 9 are over 15 years (IDP-Ulundi, 2006:8)

It is obvious that Mahlabathini District is a largely rural community of which 44% is currently of school going age. These rural communities have lower income levels and are more severely affected by circumstances of poverty than urban communities. Families in them mostly have women as interim household heads and very high dependency levels. The low levels of education have an impact on the types of employment opportunities that they can obtain and therefore also on potential income generation.

It has been a general norm in most parts of the historical preliterate South African society that the type of education Blacks had then, was in some ways useful in solving their socio-economic and political problems. It is common knowledge that in those years, the family was a self-sufficient unit that provided for all of its children's physical as well as emotional needs. Parents and adult members of the family passed on to their children skills needed as adults, while at the same time assisting them to morally develop a sense of right and wrong within that specific value system. Even today, children are dependent upon parents for socialisation, provision of affection and education. Parents are primary educators who have for centuries contributed to the process of children's self actualisation. According to Nesengani (2005:3) children had also been dependent on their social education to optimally reach such self-

actualisation. It is still the primary educators' responsibility for that objective to be realised.

From an educational perspective, the child is seen as a person in need of education in order to give expression to humanity. The absence of primary educators is therefore viewed in a very serious light. In this context, the resultant unexpected effects of parental absence are likely to create major changes in the child's environment that may affect their interaction with it. This will be discussed in greater detail as the study progresses. The structure of the family, which is an important component of society and significantly differs from society to society, may be influenced by ensuing changes. The family forms part of the network of other institutions of a society that differently contribute to and impact upon the development of the individual.

1.3 Statement of the problem

In this study, the researcher aims to analyse the challenges faced by child-headed families and to provide more possible solutions to the challenges of children living in child headed households at Mahlabathini District. What is the perspective of children living in child headed households in respect of:

- The nature and content of problems and challenges that they experience?

- Their priority needs?

- Their coping mechanisms?

The researcher is quite aware, in the process of learning about parent-absent children; that the underlying complexities involved with regard to the parent-absent child reality within the rural context have not yet been fully explored.

According to the study of Nesengani (2005:8) father-absence has been focused upon but not

4

parental absence, which is totally unique. The absence of both parents seems unimaginable, and there is not sufficient research undertaken in relation to parent-absent children who can lead towards the formulation of an approach for teachers and others, to effectively provide intervention and support to these children. However, in order to help rural Black children of parent-absent families in a meaningful way, parents, teachers and other partners in education need information about the nature of problems, experiences and feelings of such children.

The researcher's assumption is that parental absence could be harmful for children of all age groups. However, adolescents may tend to be extremely vulnerable, because adolescence is a period characterised by a close connection between the physical and psychological world. According to Nesengani (2005: 9) the beginning of the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. During this phase major changes of adolescence occur accompanied by changes in relationships with parents and peers. It is not a smooth transition for all individuals as the period lacks stable and predictable role expectations due to rapid societal changes. Furthermore, adolescence is a period of heightened instability, bringing social and emotional conflicts that evolve from biological maturation.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The following were the objectives of the study:

I.   To investigate the nature and the content of problems and challenges faced by child headed households.

II. To investigate the child headed households coping mechanisms.

1.5 Key questions to be answered

I.   What is the nature and content of problems and challenges experienced by child

headed families?

II.   What are the coping mechanisms used by child headed households?

1.6 Motivation for the study

Children whose parents are living with HIV or any serious disease that can lead them to death often suffer neglect, emotional and sexual abuse and stigmatisation. As a result these children tend to live unproductive lives due to impaired sense of self (low self esteem) because of an unsupportive social system. When one is talking about child- headed households, these households are often headed by an older child/young person. This has been widely documented in research on families affected by HIV/AIDS, particularly in rural areas and it is often taken as a sign of severe strain on the ability of the extended family to cope (Foster, 2004:1).

1.7 Literature Review

As stated by Garson (2003:2), a study led by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), commissioned by the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund with regard to the needs of children from child- headed families, reported in December 2002 these children did not just lack such basic needs as food, clothing and shelter, but also the guidance, support and love they generally would have received form parents. Many stop going to school in order to run the household and take care of their younger siblings, leaving them vulnerable to sexual abuse and other crimes. They are also exposed to discrimination and are vulnerable to harassment, as well as violence in their schools and communities.

Traditionally, children who were viewed as being at risk have been those threatened

academically, socially or emotionally, possibly as a result of their home situation or other circumstances, such as man-made or natural catastrophes. Typically, children who are abused, neglected or abandoned by their families or traumatised by their circumstances are at risk of underachieving academically have poor school attendance and may dropout of school more frequently (Garson, 2003:2).

According to Leatham (2005:4), adolescent learners and members of child-headed families would be expected to have psychological and educational experiences different from other adolescent learners who are cared for within families headed by parents or guardians. Their experiences may be influenced by their minority or marginalised status within the school, as well as within their relevant communities.

1.8 Research Methodology

The research design and methods used in this study would be briefly discussed in this section.

1.8.1 Research Design

The researcher has chosen a qualitative research, and for the purpose of this kind of research, a phenomenological research design. The underpinning principles of constructivism imply that knowledge is actively constructed, involving social interactions and mediation within authentic environments. A study that was conducted by Leatham (2005:4) shows that language and culture play an important role, as language serves to communicate thoughts, feelings and knowledge. Language maybe regarded as a critical link between the thoughts of people in negotiating shared meanings.

According to Leatham (2005:11), qualitative researchers do not try to draw universal

7

conclusions for all individuals with their findings, but rather try to provide contextual descriptions of individuals' or groups' behaviour and development. They provide thick descriptions of aspects of peoples' lives, for instance within the classroom environment, and in interactions with peers, parents or family life within the community. The adolescent learners, more specifically, would provide the researcher with information and descriptions of their lived experiences within a child-headed family.

Qualitative research which is preferable in studying the experiences and viewpoints of persons (Patton, 1990: 10) was chosen for this research on account of the following:

(i) It is both descriptive and specific, and focuses on certain aspects. Data gathered would enabled the researcher to describe the life world of the child headed families, including problems experienced.

(ii) It is through the interviews with children heading families that the themes characterising their life world may be identified.

(iii) It provides an in-depth and direct observation. Children without parents are observed in their different environments.

(iv) It is centred on the interviewee's life world and aims at seeking understanding of phenomena in his or her world. Through interaction with these children the researcher may gain an understanding of their life world.

1.8.2 Target population and sampling

The target population in this research consisted of children heading families from Mahlabathini area in the KwaZulu Natal Province. The sample was acquired through purposeful sampling in which information-rich informants are selected. They should therefore meet certain selection criteria. Participants would be children, who do not have parents from parent absent, like orphans and children heading families in the Mahlabathini

8

district.

The decision about sampling is an important component of qualitative methods. The researcher made a choice about what information sources to focus on. It was also established where they should be observed and interviewed. In qualitative research, Streubert & Carpenter, 1995: 23 cited by Nesengani (2005:32), the individual's first hand experience of a culture; social interaction or phenomenon is of interest. In addition, in qualitative research the appropriate sampling method is purposeful or criterion-based selection. The researcher has to select information-rich participants for the in-depth study on issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. In this regard child-headed families were considered to be the major sources of information as this relates to their experiences and problems that were encountered.

In this study the researcher acquired the sample through purposeful sampling, in which information-rich informants were selected. The criteria for selection was that they were:

(i) children heading families in Mahlabathini district

(ii) thirteen to eighteen years old in grade 7-12 at school;

(iii) from a nuclear family with no extended family members present;

1.8.3 Collection Method

According to Henning et al (2004:33), by making use of interviews, participants may provide the researcher with rich phenomenological data with regard to their lived experiences and worldviews. The researcher decided that he would make use of a mixture of methods in order to provide comprehensive data regarding the lived experiences of purposively selected adolescent learners. Methods incorporated within this inquiry would include interview schedule, focus group discussions with one group of teachers.

One author suggests the following four elements that are important in collecting data:

(i) qualitative data must capture what actually takes place and what people actually say;

9

(ii) the researcher must get close enough to the people and situation being studied to understand what goes on;

(iii) data must consist of direct quotations from people, both what they say and what they write;

(iv) and data must give a pure description of people, activities and interactions.

1.8.4 Data Analysis

The research methods used to collect data are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. By means of content analysis, the data needs to be worked in order to determine the common themes shared by members of child-headed families and the driving knowledge that underlies the realities of meaning. Barritt (1986) in Leedy and Ormrod (2001:153) states that the central task during data analysis is to identify common themes in people's descriptions of their experiences, in order to ultimately provide a general description of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the people with firsthand experience.

1.9 Classification of concepts

The core concepts in the statement of the research problem must be clearly defined.

1.9.1 Child

For the purpose of this study, a "child" means a minor or person who is less than 18 years of age as stipulated in Section 28 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (RSA) or the Childcare Act 74 of 1983.

1.9.2 Child-headed family

Child-headed family is recognised when a parent or primary caregiver of the household is terminally ill or has died. No adult family member is available to provide care and support

and where a child has assumed the role of primary caregiver, in respect of a child or children in the household in terms of providing food, clothing, and psycho-social support (Department of Social Development Policy Framework: 2004).

1.10 Value of the study

The findings of the study would assist service providers who work directly with child-headed families to understand better those children and their challenges and also those who are interested in community upliftment, which would help in building resources that would be accessible to anyone in need of them. These resources include building homes for children who are vulnerable to rape, poverty and lack of shelter.

1.11 Trustworthiness of research

This would be achieved through the application of four strategies for establishing trustworthiness and the decision trail in qualitative research, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In brief, credibility or truth value refers to whether the researcher has established confidence in the credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 290) cited by Nesengani (2005:21). It is analogous to internal validity in qualitative research, and comprises persistent observation, triangulation and structural coherence. Transferability is the extent of applicability of findings in another context. However, generalisations would not be an important aim as the contextual exploration and description of experiences and problems of the child headed families are emphasised. Dependability refers to whether the findings of the research would be consistent if the study were repeated with similar subjects in a similar. In this study this would be realised by fully describing both data collection and analysis. Confirmability (neutrality) is the degree to

which research findings can be confirmed by another researcher. This would be achieved by the manner in which it would be established that the research findings are the actual product of the participants' information. This will be discussed in greater detail as the study progresses.

1.12 Ethical measures

The ethical commitments to adolescent children who do not have parents who was the focus of the research were kept in mind. The codes of ethics by Nesengani (2005:25) serve as important guidelines to alert investigators of the ethical dimensions of their work. Merriam (1991: 178) asserts that ethics help to prevent the abuse of participants and to indicate which are morally objectionable topics in the eyes of social scientists. However, Nesengani (2005:25) suggests that in fieldwork power is shared between investigators and participants, with the latter having somewhat more power to frustrate research than researchers have to compel them to participate. In this study participants would control the setting of research and influence the research with interaction flowing freely from them. The ethical problem is for the researcher to know what to do and what not to repeat. The permission to conduct the study would be obtained from the District Department of Education, principals of schools from which participants will be drawn and also from Izinduna. The participants' identities would be protected so that the information collected would not embarrass or in other ways harm them. Furthermore, anonymity was extended not only to writing, but also to the verbal reporting of information that was be collected through observation. The participants' consent was required and obtained before conducting interviews. For the purpose of this study, the researcher explained the purpose of the research, in order to meet informed consent from all participants and principals. Participants were be assured that the data that was collected would be treated with confidentiality, and that their privacy would be protected. Furthermore,

12

in the report their real names would not to be disclosed and participants were told that they had the right to terminate participation if they so wished. The respondents' participation in this study was, therefore, voluntary. In addition, Bogdan and Bilken (1992: 55) suggest that an aspect of ethics in research is that the researcher should be unbiased in the research process, including the report.

1.13 Outline of the study

The chapters for this study are arranged as follows:

Chapter one serves as a background and contextualisation of the study. It explains the purpose and aims of the study to the reader. An overview of the research design methods of data collection an analysis is provided. The assumption held by the researcher prior to the phenomenological inquiry is also included.

Chapter Two presents an in-depth discussion of the literature consulted, which grounds the inquiry academically. The researcher discusses African family life in the past and present South African contexts.

Chapter Three develops and elaborates the research design along with the methodology underpinning the phenomenological inquiry. This explains the methods of data collection that were chosen as well as describing the analysis and interpretation of data.

Chapter Four includes a discussion of the final themes and the subsequent findings that are provided and constructed between the research participants and the inquirer.

Finally, in Chapter Five, is important as it provides a summary of the inquiry as a whole. It

also reflects on the limitations of the research and makes recommendations for future research within a similar context.

1.14 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the study. It has focused upon the background of the study, aims and the general course that the study describes.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2. Perspectives on Children from Child-headed Families

2.1 Introduction

Adolescence is a fascinating developmental period both for the individual learners and for their families (Leatham; 2005:47). Child-headed households are a growing problem because children have no one looking after them and are, therefore, vulnerable. They often have to drop out of school to work and have to worry about where their next meal is coming from. In some countries, they cannot go to the doctor because the doctor would not see them without an adult being present. They have to ask their neighbours for support but sometimes their neighbours are too busy to help them, or want nothing to do with them because of how their parents died.

Within this chapter the researcher's aim is to outline a literature review that will support and enhance understanding of the lives and social contexts of children from child-headed families. Also in this chapter, the researcher will expand and discuss a theoretical framework that is the most appropriate. This situates childhood development within social contexts. Thereafter, the international perspective of child headed families is discussed to provide an overview of child headed families within African context, following an understanding of the social and cultural context of childhood. In addition, reference is made to the relevant policies and legal rights of children in the country.

2.2 Ecological system model as theoretical framework

The ecological-systems perspective is valuable in the sense that it not only provides information on individuals and their development on an intra-personal level, but also looks at the systems and settings within which the individual and groups develop and function (Leatham, 2005:48). The reciprocal nature of the interaction between the child and his or her environment is best illustrated by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development. Bronfenbrenner used the concept of an ecological system to describe the inter-relationship of the developing child and his or her environment.

Leatham, (2005:49) states that: "development takes place through process of progressively more organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment." Thus, the ecological model focuses firstly on the different things (such as family, school and community), within which human development transpires, and secondly on the interaction that occurs between individuals (members from child headed families) and groups (peers or teachers) in those settings. This perspective is needed to understand the adolescent, not just his or her own individual bio-psychological development, but also through taking settings into account. Development takes place within these settings through reciprocal interaction, such as within the community, school, peer group, economic influences and the social-political environment.

Swart & Pettipher (2005:13-15) provide an overview of Bronfenbrenner's revised model of human development now called the bio-ecological model, within which the four principal components, namely 'process', 'person', 'context' and 'time' have been extended. Eamon (2001:256) provides an integrated summary of the bio-ecological model's principles, stating

that the model's two main assumptions are that human development takes place through a process of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between the individual and the environment- these interactions or proximal process being active and evolving, and positioned as the primary mechanisms producing human development.

Time plays an important role as for these proximal processes to be effective. They should occur over an extended period of time, during, for instance, the parent-child relationship or the children's interactions within the school community involved in learning, recreational activities and socialising with the peer group. Within these proximal processes, the genetic potential for effective psychological functioning is realised. Secondly, the proximal process' effectiveness is determined by the bio-psychological characteristics of the individual (for instance spontaneous, good communicator, social), the environment in which the process takes place (for example, economic deprivation) and the development outcome being observed (acquiring economic independence through employment).

In Grotevant (1998:106), cited by Leatham (2005) explains the ecological systems model as being the person, process, context and time, 'nested' in the environment, and arranged according to the micro-systems, meso system, exo-system and macro-system. Grotvant (1998:106) & Eamon (2001:256) explain these 'nested cultures' as the micro-systems being the immediate settings containing the developing person, involving the immediate contexts and relationships the person is interacting within.

The meso-system refers to those interactions between the micro-systems, both or more containing the developing person, for instance the individual being part of the child-headed family, school community and peer group.

17

The exo-system indirectly influences the person's development, although the person is not actually in that system. For instance, the family-head might rather spend time with friends at community tavern instead of with his siblings. Meanwhile, the macro-system involves the broader cultural, systems of meaning and socio-economic environments encompassing the other systems involved.

Lastly, the chrono- system refers to the effect of consistency and change over the life course of a person.

Name	Definition	Example
1. Meso-system	This layer provides the connection between the structures of the child's micro-system	The connection between the child's teacher and his parents, between his church and his neighborhood.
2. Micro-system	This is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The micro-system encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with her immediate surroundings .Structures in the micro system include family,	A child's parents may affect his beliefs and behavior; however, the child also affects the behavior and beliefs of parent. Bronfenbrenner calls these *bi-directional influences,* and he shows how they occur among all levels of environment. The

	school, neighborhood, or childcare environments. At this level, relationships have impact in two directions- both away from the child and toward the child.	Interaction of structures within a layer and interactions of structures between layers is key to this theory.
3. Exo-system	This layer defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly. The structures in this layer impact on the child's development by interacting with some structure in his or her micro-system.	Parent work place schedule or community based family resources.
4. Macro-system	This layer may be considered the outermost layer in the child's environment. While not being specific framework, this layer is comprised of cultural values and customs.	If it is the belief of the culture that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children, that culture is less likely to provide resources to help parents. This, in turn, affects the structures in which parents function. The parents' ability or inability

		to carry out that responsibility toward their child within the context of the child's micro system is likewise affected.
5. Chrono-sytem	This system encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environments. Elements within this system can be either external or internal.	External, such as the timing of a parent's death or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child.

Leatham (2005) summarises the three principles as, firstly, viewing the individual's own development shaped by conditions and events during the historical period through which the person lives. Secondly, the biological timing, social transitions, role expectations and opportunities throughout the individual's life course play a major factor in his/her development. Lastly, it is very important to keep in mind that the lives of family members are interdependent, that is their own personal reactions to historical events or transitions affect the developmental course of other family members within and across generations. The ecological systems theory highlights the complexity of the interactions and interdependence of multiple systems, the impact on the children and, specifically relevant to this inquiry, children from child-headed families and their development.

2.3 The South African Perspective on Child-Headed Families

According to Nesengani (1991:9) with the onset of industrialisation in most countries and

during the nineteenth century among Black South Africans and elsewhere, the extended family was a dominant form of the structure of the family. In this type of structure, secondary relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, or cousins that lived in the same household as the primary family gave way to the nuclear family. In this context of changed values and cultural family structure, it now consists solely of parents and their offspring living in the same household.

This setting creates new problems for the family. In the nuclear family more and more time is taken by work. Many adults seem to have less time to spend with family members. As a result of this change, members of the extended family are likely to live far away and not in the same house or community as they might have done half a century ago. Pringle (1987: 59) states: "What has changed is that most people no longer live with relatives and friends most of their lives, such that they are not surrounded by a network of kinship and neighborhood, all within walking distance."

The majority of the Black population still lives in the rural and deep rural areas. The value system of the largest number of these people is traditionally African that illuminates "Ubuntu" or humanity among them. According to Lombard (1992:8) the traditional African is more communalistic, placing a high value of relationships with other people. This author maintains that South Africa is presently a developing country characterised by a multicultural population that is at different levels of development and with diverse values and systems of norms. African and western cultures have in the twentieth century tended to show marked differences as most South African people developed educationally and in the industrial sphere (Le Roux, 1994: 34). Lombard (1992: 14) asserts that there is still a fundamental difference between modern westernized and the African value systems, with regard to the size of the

family. The psychosocial traditionally African value dimension manifests itself in a large family norm, as opposed to the small family norm of the modern western value system (Le Roux, 1994: 35). In order to deal with the problem of population growth successfully, the transition from a traditional outlook on family size will have to be encouraged and supported. Lombard (1992: 4) claims: "It is the importance of the particular African value system that is the source of the problem of high population growth. Many black people in the urban areas are already in favour of the small family as a norm, although most have practically not changed."

In view of the present negative attitudes with regard to family size among most African families, a large number of parent-absent children may suffer untold hardship in relation to parental absence. This premise is based on the fact that in view of the traditional trend on the size of the family, the rural areas are overpopulated and impoverished (Louw, 1998: 45). Consequently, South Africa is presently experiencing the intense urbanisation that as it cannot be seen in isolation, it may be placing a definite socio-economic strain on urban communities. The large population movement today and in the future will be from the rural areas to the metropolitan areas (Lombard, 1991: 11). Accelerated urbanisation besides causing a backlog of housing of millions of dwelling units in South Africa causes parents to leave children alone in the rural areas. This problem, if viewed within the whole setting of societal change poses a very serious threat to the future of children in the rural areas and of the whole society at large.

Le Roux, (1994: 35) cited by Nesengani (2005:86) suggests that today the largest section of the rural population, whether in the rural areas or part of the urban population in the informal settlements, is caught up in abject poverty. It is characterised by low economic, social status

and levels of education. Most are unemployed and have a limited potential capacity for upward economic mobility (Nesengani, 1991: 34). The questions of poverty in the rural areas and the parents' movement to the urban areas have enormous implications for the upbringing of the child and resultant disorganisation of the family.

The effects of parental absence cannot be seen in isolation as they further impact on the changes of the greater society, where poverty is likely to be persistently reproduced. Consequently, the future of rural Black children who constitute the majority of poorest people in South Africa may be seriously affected as they are on the receiving end. Some of the most serious challenges that appear to be facing South Africa and the African continent as a whole are the production of sufficient food and work for the ever-increasing number of population in the rural areas.

The feeding capacity and the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions within the rural areas may further aggravate the problem of poverty and crime (Le Roux, 1994: 219). In the rural areas there are a great number of such people than those in the informal settlements in cities, who are hungry because they do not have the basic means of production like land. People are in dire need of land to cultivate maize during summer. The shortage of land compels them to even practice such farming in mountainous areas, which might tend to be the cause of soil erosion. Furthermore, monoculture is practiced year in and year out, this depleting the soil of its nutrients necessary to sustain its productive value (Le Roux, 1994: 191). Sometimes even those that have land for the cultivation of crops tend to suffer from crop failure as a result of natural causes like drought because rainfall can be a limiting factor for farming.

The increasing population growth in the rural areas is likely to cause pollution and depletion of ecological natural resources. These might possibly deprive or totally disown the future generation of their rights, causing further loss of identity in children (Louw, 1998: 45).

2.4 International Perspective on Child-Headed Families

Internationally, child-headed families are not a phenomenon that has been known to society for a long time, their having emerged as alternative family structures in order to adapt to the changing realities, elevating the pressure put on extended families as 'safety nets'. Parents die for a variety of reasons, for instance the HIV/AIDS pandemic, other health factors, war and genocide. The plan organisation in Uganda (2005:2) mentions that the first reports of child-headed families were made in the late 1980's in the Rakai district of Uganda (World Health Organisation, 1990). Foster et al (1997), as sourced by Plan (2005:2), mention that until then orphans in Africa did not exist, as the extended families within the African kinship system took the orphans into their care. Due to the number of orphans increasing, the extended families were no longer able to support them according to their traditional customs.

According to the National Orphans and Vulnerable Children's Policy of Uganda, 940,000 children – 14% of their child population – had been orphaned by AIDS by the year 2003 (Ministry of Gender,2003; in Plan, 2005:3). In a survey conducted by Plan Uganda in 2001, 3% of the caretakers within orphaned families were under the age of 19, a percentage on the rise (Plan, 2005:3). Plan, together with the Uganda government, has formulated the Orphans and Vulnerable Children's National Policy in order to implement support programmes for child-headed families (Plan, 2005:3). A submission to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also been made by Plan (2005:1-8) with regard to support of AIDS orphans in child-headed households in Uganda.

24

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda left 42,000 child-headed households affecting 101,000 children, and resulted in the world's largest proportion of child-headed families. Foster (2004:4-5) discussed the weakening of the extended family's safety nets in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. According to Urassa et al in Foster (2000:4), fewer than 10% of orphaned children in Tanzania still received support from other relatives or elsewhere.

2.5 The Social and Cultural Context of Childhood and Adolescence

Grotevant (1998:1097) as cited by Leatham (2005:59) mentions that a comprehensive understanding of childhood and adolescence requires the consideration of the changing individual within the dynamic changing multilayered contexts. This may include the child's own personal characteristics, belief systems, and relationships with friends, family and parents, activity settings such as school, leisure activities, and macro-systems such as the above mentioned history of a country, culture, political and economic environments. What is important though is to acknowledge that different cultures have different ways of supporting members from their society into adulthood, with distinct variations in several dimensions, such as levels of stress being experienced and duration.

Grotevant (1998:1098) reports on the interview held with Samoan-born woman that the developmental stages as applied by Western perspectives did not really come into play with to her experiences moving from childhood to adulthood. She explained that all she knew was that family, community and culture were important, as they determined the way she behaved, thought and felt. It did not matter how old one was. If one's elders did not consider one responsible enough one would not be treated as an adult.

2.6 Family Life as Supportive Context

Moletsane (2004:168) mentions that family definitions, forms and characteristics have changed greatly over time and within different societies. Although diverse types of families exist, none is without some form of familial pattern, called the 'kinship system', which provide for relative committed relationships between the family members. According to Trawick-Smith (2003:19) African history shows strong kinship and tribal bonds, which suggest that adults showed a high degree of concern and care towards children, as well as toward members of their families and communities. The mother-child relationships were especially strong in earlier Africa, and are still deeply rooted in the African heritage and philosophical orientation. Moletsane (2004:169) is of the opinion that some form of patriarchy still exists in the traditional African families, where men (husbands and fathers) are the authoritative figures.

Generally it is perceived that a family unit provides the ideal context within which a child may develop to his or her optimal potential. Papalia and Olds (1989) in Seedat, Duncan & Lazarus (2001:328) explain that the family unit not only satisfies children's physiological needs but also their emotional, cognitive and other higher order needs. The family also serves as one of the most effective buffers between children and social stressors. Members from child-headed families, however, do not have the protection and support of parents who can stand in for their children during times of difficulty. Netshiombo (1993) in Seedat et al (2001:329) found that children who can rely on a supportive family environment are less adversely affected by exposure to traumatic events than other children. Dawes (1989) in Govender et al (2001:2) argues however that the pressure of at least one warm, supportive parent can reduce the impact of stressful circumstances. Here the important roles of mothers are supported, keeping in mind the above mentioned mother child relationship that is still

deeply rooted in African cultures.

However, due to South Africa's history of oppression and its negative effects on the majority of African families, the supportive and protective contexts of the family system have diminished. A study done by Barbarian and Richter (2001) in Soudien et al (2003 :264) showed that in the majority of African households there are either mothers who were not married to their children's fathers or fathers who did not reside in the same household as the mothers and children. This leaves the mothers with the responsibility of raising the children on their own. The presence of male figures in the homes is not always good, as it may produce even greater hardship for children living in lower socio-economic households, with alcohol abuse adding to the problem. As mentioned in Seedat et al (2001:329), a great number of families are living in townships in severely overcrowded, under serviced, crime-ridden and poverty stricken areas, causing a tremendous amount of stress of tension on family life leading to high levels of tension and anger. Angless and Shefer (1997) in Seedat et al (2001:329) also link this to the neglect and at times abuse of children within families. Letlaka-Rennert (1990) in Stevens et al (1997:252) found that the destruction of African family relations may also have contributed to the increased emotional insecurity among African adolescents and consequently may experience difficulties relating to emotional independence during and after adolescence.

2.7 Human Needs and Motives: Humanistic Perspective

Children from child-headed families, like any other human beings are motivated by their needs and motives in whatever they intend to do in their lives. Louw, Gerdes and Meyer (1984: 141) cited by Nesengani (2005:98) indicate that all creatures share motives consisting of primitive simple nature, as well as sophisticated and complicated ones. According to

27

Maslow cited in Louw, Gerdes and Meyer (1984: 142) the higher motives will appear only to the degree that more basic ones have been satisfied. Maslow maintains that the most highly evolved motive in his hierarchy is that of self-actualisation, which is described as a desire to make the best of oneself, that is, what people themselves want to be (Louw, Gerdes & Meyer 1984: 141).

Maslow's premise that higher motives will appear only to the degree that more basic ones have already been satisfied may have serious implications for the rural children who heads the family transition from childhood to adulthood. One of the challenges is that the rural child headed family's home was impoverished before their parents migrated to the urban areas or died. Therefore, within the parent absent home it may not be likely that the satisfaction of more basic needs may be realised. As can be seen in Maslow's theory, the traditional view to how the adolescent child may behave within given contexts relies upon whether her or his physiological needs have been satisfied or not. Therefore, the rural child will have to get food and other physiological needs first, before any subsequent needs or motives can be met.

Viewed from the Maslowian perspective, the future of rural Black children may be at risk if the issues that evolve the unavailability of basic needs are left to chance. It is perceived that the highest need or motive, self-actualisation may not be realised without having first attended to the socio-economic issues of the parent absent child (Nesengani, 2005:99).

2.8 The Significance of Parent-Child Relationship

Lamb (1987: 137) observes that some communities are currently in flux in matters of parental roles. There is evidence that some long-established assumptions, values and attitudes concerning children, their care and their needs relationship begins at the earliest stages of the

individual's life. The nurturing behaviours of parents that predict social competence include the affectionate and friendly interaction with the child. Davenport (1994: 178) suggests that parent-child relationships influence personality orientations. The author argues that the development of psychological needs; vocational interests and choices are some of the ways in which the individual try to satisfy those needs.

During the child's adolescence stage, one of the tasks that parents face is introducing the child to the peer group. Papalia and Olds (1992: 236) indicate that parents are interested in their child's earliest interaction with peers, but with time, parents become more seriously invested in their children's ability to get along with playmates. According to Davenport (1994: 190) adolescence is a phase when relationship with peers and reality slowly replace the relationship with parents. Another parents' task is to build interpersonal relationships with the child that give the opportunity to nurturance. Murphy and Kupshik (1992:38) indicate that nurturance is provided by relationships in which the adult takes the responsibility for the well being of the child. Lamb (1987: 207) argues that where the father shares the responsibility of upbringing and care, there is a much better chance of the child's triumphing over his problems, than if the mother is left to cope by herself. Lamb (1987) further indicates that fathers make an indispensable contribution in the psychological development of their children, daughters as well as sons (Nesengani, 2005: 101).

2.9 Policies and legal rights and needs of children

Rights and needs are two concepts that are somehow related. It is, therefore, important for the researcher to make a connection between the two (Mkhize, 2006:33). According to Johnson (1992:5) "a need is that which is necessary for either a person or a social system to function within reasonable expectation give the situation that exists". A right is what one is entitled to

and test ensures just and fair treatment of individuals. Children have fundamental needs that should be fulfilled but sometimes circumstances are such that the needs of the children remain unfulfilled. This is where it becomes essential to consider the rights of the children to whether the need is that particular point in time.

Rights are important in the sense that, through provision of services, children's needs are met and they, therefore, do not fall within the cracks. The constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996 makes provision for the protection of children. The Act requires that everything done by the administration or any public body, which affects children, must be shown to be the best interest of the child. Section 28, in particular, focuses on the rights of children and contains fundamental concepts, which have been developed in international treaties for protection of children (Mkhize, 2006:38). It recognises that children have a right to grow up with dignity and feeling of self worth, that they are entitled to be protected from any form of abuse, and that they entitled to make decisions about their own lives.

The burgeoning of child-headed families is indicative of the fact that the rights of children as enshrined in the constitution are violated or undermined (Mkhize, 2006:39). The fact that these children's right to parental care has been compromised through the loss of their parents is a cause for concern. Children's rights that are reviewed in this section are: The rights to family or parental care, the right to love, protection and care, the right to life, and the right to education.

2.9.1 Right to family or parental care

According to Skelton (1998:27) as cited by Mkhize (2006:40) says that children have a right to live with their parents unless this is incompatible with their best interest. The basic and all

30

pervasive feature of ideal parental love is that the child is valued unconditionally irrespective of his or her sex, appearance, abilities and personality. This love is given without expectation of or demand of gratitude. Parents communicate this conditional affection through all their relations with the child. This unconditional love ranges from physical care and handling to the child's first smile and sounds, from protecting the child from the world and gradually initiating his or her into the social world. Approval and acceptance by others are essential for the development of self approval and self acceptance. Whether a child will develop constructive or deconstructive attitude depends mostly on his or her parent's attitude towards him or her. This would be either a substitute or foster parent. In a child headed family the substitute caregiver is a child who would have to balance his or her developmental needs with the needs of the younger siblings whom he or she is taking care of. This is indicative of the fact that the right to parental care is compromised (Mkhize, 2006:41).

The mother provides love and care, enabling the child to develop trust. The child learns to trust the mother and develops trust in other people. It is worth noticing that a child is by nature a social being and needs to develop ability to meet and mix with others. The fathers' role has been related to physique and entails the support and the protection of the family. This role has evolved and includes emotional commitments and often direct involvements in the care and upbringing of children. While mothers are children's primary care givers, fathers do spend time playing with their babies as mothers do but less time feeding and bathing, they see their role providing material needs for the children, (Mkhize, 2006:43).

The child's development cannot be understood properly without consideration of the critical role of the family in the child's developmental process. Children do not develop into competent adults simply through their unfolding of their genetic endowment. They require

31

direction and elimination of their vast potential to develop into integrated individuals capable of living in a society together with their fellows. The early stages of the life cycle upon which all later developments rest transpire in the family environment. The family is entrusted by society with the task of providing for its children's needs while simultaneously transmitting the society to child-headed families, there is no buffer that mediates between the child and the outside world.

2.9.2 Right to life

Children have a right to life and it must ensure the children survival and development (Skelton, 1998:27). The right to life is aimed at ensuring the physical and the mental health of the children. This means that living environment of the children would have to be favourable for the survival of the children. Children's access to food often declines due to loss of family income. The family income levels may decline while the parents are still alive but due to ill health their ability to work declines. It is even worse when both parents are dead. Many children who lose their parents are sent to separate families. In some instances, children opt to live together all by themselves after their parents have died. In such instances children would rely on their neighbours for food in order to survive and this will depend on the income levels of that community (Mkhize, 2006:46).

In communities that are faced by poverty for instance, it may not be possible for the neighbours to provide food for the children. Neighbours would sometimes bring the plight of the children to the attention of social workers who would provide food parcels as a relief while they make arrangements for the children to find alternative family care. In the child-headed family, children have to take care of their siblings and make sure that they do not sleep without eating something.

2.9.3 Right to love, protection and care

According to Mkhize (2006:47), this is best understood in the context of a mother-child relationship, which is very first interpersonal relationship that is the basis for the development of trust. The healthy development of the personality, the ability to respond to affection and in time to become a loving, caring parent depends on it. In circumstances where there is no parent, a caregiver who is a mature adult plays a significant role in meeting this particular need. According to her the need for love is met when the child is experiencing a loving, stable, continuous and dependable relationship with his or her caregiver. This experience should be from birth onwards until the child is developed into an emotionally mature individual. It is through this realisation of personal identity and feelings of self worth. Since there is no mature adult in child-headed family, the possibility is that the need for love by other siblings whose need for love would remain unmet. An unmet need for love and security results impaired social development. The need for love and security is essential for one's social functioning at all levels. In the event this need is not met adequately, the consequence can be disastrous later on, both for individual and society.

2.9.4 Right to Education

Children have a right to education so that they grow up to be the best they can. Children would have to be critical, curious and develop their capacity through institution. According to Skelton (1998:28), education should be directed at developing the child's personality and talents, preparing the child for active life as an adult, fostering respect for basic rights and developing respect for the child's own cultural and national values and those of others.

Depriving opportunity to education would limit the child's understanding of his or her responsibilities to the community, society, the State and legally recognised communities as enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child.

2.10 Summary

Growing up in poverty, in a child headed home or in the community that does not provide sufficient employment opportunities, or where there is no cohesion, may mean different things to different people. Thus, children may respond to their circumstances differently and have different developmental outcomes.

Chapter two has focused on literature review. When studying the needs of child-headed households the researcher considered an understanding of the background information about where the early adolescent child is found. In order to achieve this goal, the researcher presented issues that concern the international perspective on child-headed families, South African context of the child headed families, humanistic perspective about human needs and motives, the significance of parent-child interaction and the rights of children in South Africa.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Neuman (2000:190) defines research methodology as a plan of action to measure variables of interest. The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by child-headed families at Mahlabathini in KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter deals with research design, sampling, data collection and data analysis.

3.2 The Tenets of Qualitative Research

Babbie and Mouton (2001:270-274) highlight the following tenets of qualitative research:

3.2.1 The qualitative areas of social life

Qualitative research describes actions within a specific setting and invites rather than tries to control the possibility of an array of variables. It presents research in terms of human relationships, and invokes the need to discover as much about what the research subjects feel about the information they provide.

It is in these qualitative areas of social life, that is, the backgrounds, interests and broader social perceptions which defy quantitative research that qualitative research fits. Qualitative research does not pretend to solve the problems of quantitative research, but does not see them as constraints.

It sees to find ways to reduce the effect of uncontrollable social variables in order thereby to investigate them directly.

3.2.2 Managing subjectivity

It is acknowledged that the researcher is the most important instrument in the research process. The researcher needs to be unbiased in his or her descriptions and interpretations. He or she needs to get close to research subjects, gaining trust and establishing rapport, in order to generate and truthful description.

To understand human behaviour, it is insufficient to rely on quantitative survey and statistics. It is, therefore, necessary to delve into the subjective qualities that govern behaviour. Qualitative researchers are increasingly expected to come out and tell it as it really happened.

3.2.3 Developing rigour through writing

In quantitative research, the sequence of steps is prescribed. It is thus difficult to respond to uncontrollable variables. On the other hand, qualitative research has the resource to be liberated from a tight step by step approach. Decisions about research instruments are made in gradual response to the nature of the social setting being investigated as its nature revealed. This means that every qualitative research design would be different.

3.2.4 Judicious balance

In qualitative research, there is a concern for how the research strategy suits the research setting, in terms of feasibility and the researcher-participant relationship. There are two sides of qualitative research. To meet the exigencies of the social situation being studied, the researcher is afforded the freedom to explorer creatively the best way to approach a scenario. The two sides represent the judicious balance between taking the opportunity to encounter the research setting while maintaining the principles of social science.

3.2.5 Research as social action

Several issues are involved in the balance between creative opportunity and maintaining a scientific principle. Creative exploration makes qualitative research akin to the research we all do in everyday life. Approaching the research setting appropriately involves interaction between the culture of the setting and the culture of research.

Like many aspects of professional and private life, research is part of social action. The written study becomes an account of a personal struggle to make sense of complex human situations within which the researcher himself may well become implicated.

3.3 Research Design

The research design is the blue-print of a detailed plan of how the study is going to be conducted (Grinnell, 1993).

Designing a research project involves organising, collection and analysis of data to fulfil the purpose of the research.

3.3.1 Descriptive Design

As part of qualitative research, the research methodology was descriptive (Mouton & Marais, 1996: 39; Bogdan & Bilken, 1992:30). The data collected were in the form of words, rather than numbers. The written results of the research should contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation. The purpose of descriptive research is limited to charting something as it is, and with the researcher taking things as they are

(Merriam, 1988: 7). Merriam suggests that descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation are sought. In this study the researcher aims at describing as accurately as possible the experiences and problems of the child-headed families due to the fact that little is known about this problem area in Mahlabathini.

3.4 Sampling

Mc Kendrick (2000) defines sampling as the drawing of a small portion of elements from a larger or total population. The specific list of the members of the population is called a sampling frame (Chalufu, 1999:40). The subset of the population actually drawn from the sampling frame is called a sample.

The basic idea behind sampling is that we would like to learn about the characteristics of a larger group of individuals (referred to as population) by studying a smaller group (referred to as sample, Ray & Ravizza, 1988:254) cited by Chalufu,(1999:40). In this study the sample consisted of five (5) children from five (5) different schools who are from child-headed families at Mahlabathini in KZN.

3.4.1 Population

The concept "population" refers to the general group from which the targeted group is drawn One of the important elements of qualitative research with regard to sampling is that the sample is taken from the population in which the phenomenon is explored. The population consists of children from child-headed families in the rural schools of Mahlabathini in KZN Province.

According to Schweigert (1994) a population consists of all members of a given group. For this study the population comprised children aged between thirteen (13) to eighteen (18) years old in grade 7-12 at school who are from or who are from child-headed family at Mahlabathini. These children reside in rural areas of Mahlabathini. The target group was drawn from the above-said children group and their experiences and problems were studied.

3.4.2 Sampling method

The researcher used the non-probability sampling method. The researcher used the purposive sampling strategy. It is based on the judgement of the researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample.

In purposive sampling the investigator hand –picks the elements to be included in the sample on basis of expert those judged to have certain special characteristics or more (commonly) those who are likely to provide the most useful information for the purposes for which the study is done (Chalufu, 1999:41). It ensures that the sample includes elements which are directly relevant to the problem being studied.

The children were found in the local schools through contact with principals and teachers at the schools. Teachers identified the learners who are heading the families or from child-headed family.

Permission to interview the children was sought from principals and confidentiality of the information obtained was explained to them. The children gave their consent to be included

in the study.

There were five (5) children from five (5) different schools and their ages were between thirteen (13) years and eighteen (18) years.

3.5 Data Collection

The researcher used the interview schedule to collect data. According to Bailey (1987), an interview schedule is defined as a list of questions read by the interviewer to a respondent with the interviewer writing down the respondent's answers on a schedule.

Grinnell (1993) perceives an interview as a valuable method in helping to identify the depth and breadth of the problem areas. It allows probing, thus enabling the researcher to obtain responses in areas where specific questions are difficult to construct.

The interview schedule helped the researcher to ensure that all questions were answered and there was no chance for respondents to ignore other questions. The interviews took place at the schools where children attend their classes.

The interview schedule was the appropriate data collection method because of the age of the children. The researcher was able to ask questions and explain those questions which the children were not able to understand.

3.5.1 Validity and reliability

The researcher's main concern was whether the study would measure the variable that it was intended to measure and a major concern would whether the measuring device measured the concept as it is theoretically defined. To ensure that the findings were accurate the reliability and validity of the study were taken into consideration.

According to Babbie (1992:131), the concept "validity" refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration.

The subjects for the pilot study were children of the same age group as the sample who were from child-headed families at Mahlabathini in KZN. The test result was that the children in the study were able to answer questions in the interview schedule, and the answers gave what was needed.

3.6 Data analysis

The analysis of data answers the question of how the researcher will arrange and order findings (Grinnell, 1993). Data analysis included tables, frequency distribution percentages. Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing organising the data (i.e., text data as intrancripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell,2007:148)

3.7 Conclusion

This study used the qualitative research design that is descriptive in nature. Data was gathered through the use of interviews schedule.

Lincoln & Guba's (1985: 288) strategy of trustworthiness was used to establish the validity and reliability of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher aimed at giving the interpretation of the raw data collected by making sense out of it. Thematic analysis was chosen as a method of data analysis. Data analysis is defined as the process whereby order, structure and meaning are imposed on the mass information that is collected (Bryman & Burgess, 1994).

Table 4.1

Number of children at home	Percentage
8 (in one family)	30.8 %
5 (3 families out of the whole sample)	57.7 %
3 (1 family out of the sample)	11.5 %
Total	100 %

Table 4.1 above indicates that three families (representing 57.7%) out of the sample of five (5) participants had five children in their household. One family (11.5%) had eight children and 1 family (30.8%) had three children. This highlighted the density of children in each family with the need to survive and taken care of following the death of their parents. This was over and above the fact that most of these individuals were minors who did not have jobs and stable income but somehow had to carry on with life without basic means to do so.

Table 4.2

Ages of children	Percentage
Below age 10 (9 out of the whole sample)	34.6 %
11-17 (11 children out of the sample taken)	42 %
18 and above (6 out of the whole sample)	23.1 %
Total	100 %

The total number of children was 26 (addition of every member present in these child-headed families). 11 children (42%) were between the ages of 11-17. Nine children (34.6%) were below age 9 years and six children (23.1%) were 18 years and above.

Table 4.3

Period lived in the absence of parents	Percentage
Below 1 year (3 families)	60 %
2 to 3 years (1 family)	20 %
4 years and above (1 family)	20 %
Total	100 %

Three of these child-headed families (60%) had been living without parents for a period of less than a year. One family (20 %) lived on their own for the period between 2-3 years following the death of their parents. One family (20%) had lived in the absence of their caregivers for a period of 4 years and above.

Table 4.5

Cause of death	Percentage
Sickness (3 families)	60 %
Car accident (1 family)	20 %
Murdered (1 family)	20 %
TOTTAL	100%

Three participants (60%) reported that their parents passed away due to illness. One participant (20%) reported that their parents' passed on owing to a car accident. One participant 20%) reported that their parents were murdered.

Table 4.6

Reason for not living with relatives	Percentage
Poor relationship (4 families)	80 %
Relatives living in another province (1 family)	20 %
Total	100 %

The most prominent reason given by participants (80% of the sample) for not living with their relatives was poor relationships. Some participants further highlighted that they had felt ostracised, isolated and discriminated against by their relatives following the death of their parents. This was the reason for their preference of trying to make it on their own without the involvement of relatives. One participant (20% reported that the reason informing the decision of living on their own was that their relatives lived in a different province.

Table 4.7

Roles assumed after parents' death	Percentage
Childcare (4 families)	80 %
Basic provision (2 families)	20 %
Family maintenance	
Leadership	
Decision making	
TOTAL	100%

Four participants (80% of the sample) reported that it was their responsibility to care for the younger siblings after the death of their parents. One participant (20%) reported that the main responsibility observed after losing their parents was basic provision which was directly linked to survival.

Setting family rules

What rules are made?

The rules set in each family of the participants differed with commonalities here and there. It was observed that some of these rules reflected on the standards and principles that the parents taught them before they passed away.

Who sets limits for behaviour?

All participants reported that the older sibling was the one who set limits for behaviour of the younger siblings. This is effective for the efficient functioning of the family system despite the known imbalances in the hierarchy.

Who sets family rules?

The older sibling was again identified by all participants as the individual who took the role of setting the roles that were thought to be important for the smooth functioning of the system.

Need for survival

What do you usually eat?

The responses given by participants varied according to preference of different types of food and affordability. However, it was evident in all cases that they were well taken care of.

Who provides for food?

P 1: "The older sibling"

P 2: "The older sister"

P 3: "Sister"

P 4: "My older sister and my mom's sister"

P 5: "My older sister"

All participants reported that the older sibling took on the responsibility of ensuring that the basic needs (provision of food in this case) are met in their household. The researcher observed that this was often a common pattern in older children i.e. taking over the role of parenting where the parent was unable (which in this case is the demise of a caregiver). This is a positive attribute or characteristic as these individuals tend to learn earlier in life about taking responsibility. However, the disadvantage of the situation is that these individuals (i.e. older siblings) often end up neglecting their own needs in desperate need to fulfil the need of being there for others.

Financial need

What is the family's source of income?

P 1: "We get support from the government"

P 2: "We go and work in other people's houses and leave the younger siblings at home"

P 3: "No income"

P 4: "My sister's job"

P 5: "We work in other people's houses"

Three participants reported that they sought jobs in the surrounding (i.e. working for other

people in the community). One participant stated that they had no source of income. However, somehow they were still able to survive. One family was observed to be more fortunate than the others because the older sibling was said to have a well paying job. Therefore the lack of finances was not a concern in this family. The researcher found this to be of concern as resourced equipped to assist these individuals should have been readily available. For example, grants from the government.

Social Assistance Act No.13 of 2004 serves to provide for the rendering of social assistance to persons. The provisions of the Act are in line with the constitution of the republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) which provides that everyone has the right to have access to social security. The beneficiaries of social assistance are individuals who are unable to support themselves and their dependents. Social assistance obliges the state to take reasonable legislative measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights with regard to the care for the children who might be in need of parental care, the Act makes provision for the children to be placed either with a foster parent or primary care giver. In practice, the implication would that any person could foster a child who is in need of parental care and coincidentally in child-headed families, an older sibling happen to be a primary care giver.

Social workers in their intervention with client systems take cognisance of characteristics of the client system and the impinging forces from the client systems environment. They perform a wide range of roles that define responsibilities for social workers and their client system. It is worth mentioning that a child headed family is a relatively new form of a family and social workers should have an ability to respond to human needs in a ever changing world. Child-headed families present a situation where the fundamental needs of the children

are unmet. Social workers would have to advocate for justice in the delivery of services to ensure that the well being of the children is maintained.

What is the amount of the income?

P 1: "R700"

P 2: "R200"

P 3: "No income"

P 4: "R7000"

P 5: "R400"

The income received by participants in this sample differed according to the method used to obtain it. For example, the amount earned for being employed by people differed from that of the individuals who reported receiving grants from the government. One participant stated that their income was R7000 and the sister was said to have a good employment.

How is money spent?

P 1: "We buy uniform for school and pay for the school fees"

P 2: "We buy food and second hand clothes"

P 3: "No money"

P 4: "We spend it on food, transport fares, clothing and savings"

P 5: "We use it to buy the things that we need at home and second hand things"

All participants stated that they buy the things identified as their current needs. This included

food, clothes and school items. The main strength of the data obtained was the researcher's realisation that these children had learnt to priorities for the urgent needs they were faced with.

Conflict within the family

Do you sometimes have conflict?

Responses	Percentage
Yes	100 %
No	
Total	100 %

All participants reported that they do sometimes encounter situations where conflicts arise in their families. Participant number four highlighted that one of the causes of conflict in their household was that they all liked different things, so that is where the clash of opinion often occurred.

What is the conflict about?

P 1: "When we don't see eye to eye"

P 2: "We often fight about everyone doing his or her own assigned tasks as we had agreed upon"

P 3: "About the death of our parents"

P 4: "It is always about television remote control"

P 5: "We fight about the money"

The reasons for the conflict differed in two ways according to the researcher's interpretations.

1) *Normal/expected fights in children*

There were divergent views that respondents expressed in this category. One participant reported that they often do not agree on something but was not specific. One highlighted the issue of fighting about the chores when other siblings have not done what was expected of them as per agreement when the tasks were shared amongst them. One raised the issue of arguing about the money. This may be the issue related to survival and responsibility as far as money is shared and spent in the household. The last participant raised the issue of fighting over the remote control which is also common among siblings.

2) *Serious conflicts*

One participant reported that they often argue about the death of their parents. This represented a concern for the researcher because such disputes are not often encountered in children, which represented a threat of family disintegration as arguments about death of loved ones are often accompanied by assigning blame to whoever is thought to be responsible for the death (regardless to whether real or imagined).

How do you deal with conflict?

P 1: "We talk about it, and then let it go"

P 2: "We sit down and talk as a family and explain to each other that we do not have parents as we are fighting"

P 3: "Sleeping and playing"

P 4: "We have a time table that we look at it determines who is the person controlling the remote that day"

P 5: We sit down and talk"

It appears to the researcher that all participants had learnt an adaptive way of dealing or conflict resolution. These methods may have been modelled by influential members or coping strategies that had been found to be effective in each family.

Relationship with the school

Do all children attend school?

Responses	Percentage
Yes	100 %
No	
Total	100 %

All participants reported that children in their families were all attending school. This suggests that even after the death of their parents, these children have realised the importance to carry on schooling despite the circumstances or obstacles observed and reported. This appears to be of benefit and serve as a protective factor in crime prevention and drug abuse.

As mentioned in chapter two, children have a right to education so that they grow up to be the best they can. Children would have to be critical, curious and develop their capacity through institution. According to Skelton (1998:28), education should be directed at developing the child's personality and talents, preparing the child for active life as an adult, fostering respect for basic rights and developing respect for the child's own cultural and national values and

those of others.

Depriving opportunity to education would limit the child's understanding of his or her responsibilities to the community, society, the state and legally recognised communities as enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child.

How are the school needs met?

P 1: "We buy the things we need or get them from school"

P 2: "We buy them"

P 3: "We use grant money"

P 4: "Our sister buys us all the things we need because she has a good job"

P 5: "We buy them"

All participants reported that they buy the things they needed for school. This suggests that these children had learnt to make ends meet and to be financially responsible for making it a priority that they budget for what they need although some of them did not have a stable income.

Do you get support from the school?

Responses	Percentage
Yes	60 %
No	40%
Total	100 %

Three (account for 60 % of the total sample) participants reported that they get support from school. While 2 of the five participants (40 % of the sample) reported that they did not get any help from the schools that they were attending.

Relationship with the religious system

Are you affiliated to a church or religious group?

Responses	Percentage
Yes	80 %
No	20 %
Total	100 %

Four participants (80%) reported having being affiliated to the religious group of their choice. One participant (20%) reported that his or her family was not affiliated to any religious group.

What support has the church offered?

P 1: "The church helps us with things to wear"

P 2: "They preach to us, give us food and clothing"

P 3: "No support"

P 4: "Only their sympathy"

P 5: "We get money for food"

The church involvement played a secondary assisting role (provision) in three families in

terms of giving materialistic things essential for survival (i.e. basic needs). One out of the three participants receiving help from the church further highlighted the issue of spiritual nurturing provided. The researcher observed that such (i.e. churches) community structures can have a great impact on the survival of the destitute hence their offer to help after the parents of the participants have passed on. One participant reported getting only sympathy from the church she or he is affiliated to. However, that was the family which reported as being well supported financially by a sister who is employed and by an aunt. One participant reported that she did not receive any kind of help from the church. However, she had reported that she was not being involved or affiliated to any religious group.

Chapter 5

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to bring this study to a close. Within this chapter a brief summary of the inquiry conducted will be provided. Thereafter recommendations according to the individual themes will be discussed, ultimately drawing it to a conclusion.

5.2 Findings as per objectives

The study's main objectives were:

i.   To investigate the nature and the content of problems and challenges faced by child-headed households, and

ii. To investigate on the child-headed households coping mechanisms

Conceptualised within a phenomenological and interpretivist framework, this inquiry has explored the lived experiences of purposefully selected learners from child-headed families at Mahlabathini in KwaZulu Natal. In doing so the aim of the inquiry was to come to an understanding of the meaning learners make of their lives, as limited research has been done in this regard. Consequently, it aimed at supporting School-Based Support Team members in establishing appropriate care and support measures at their schools. From the findings, this inquiry has successfully been able to fulfil the research objective as initially stated in Chapter one, namely to investigate the nature and the content of problems and challenges faced by child headed households, to investigate on the child headed households coping mechanisms.

It has provided not only descriptions of the meanings and shared lived experiences of the learners, but has also informed the inquiry of how being without parents has impacted upon their capacity to confront the adversities of life and their environment. Consequently, this inquiry has been able to show that learners from child-headed families are grounded by principles and values that indeed fuel their ability to survive. These tacit boundaries allow them to experience a relative sense of security and control over their daily living activities.

In addition, within the context of the schools and its learners participating in this inquiry, it has been confirmed, in accordance with the literature reviewed, that although learners need basic physiological and physical support, their capacity to strive above adversities and reach for future possibilities should not be underestimated. Their lived experiences and 'knowledge' motivate them to become successful.

Furthermore, it has been established that although learners do adjust to a certain degree to the loss of their parents, emotional support is an area of concern, especially during the initial period following the death of a parent. Many learners have highlighted the role of the older sibling, as she substitutes the mother's role in providing the needed guidance and care. Strong social support structures in the peer friendships and sibling sub-system have been highlighted, shifting the focus away from the extended family support that was the traditional African custom.

Although community support is being experienced on an individual level, the greater community's perceptions seem to be inadequately informed regarding the self-disciplined manner in which learners conduct themselves. The majority of the participants expressed having experienced a sense of vulnerability and exposure regarding community interaction, due to the death of their parent(s). Lastly, the heads of child-headed families experience an

58

immense sense of pressure in caring for their siblings, which at times needs to be supported constructively by caring school communities, and should not be ignored.

Finally, educational psychologists could play a meaningful role in training School-Based Support Team members, not only in counselling skills but also in bereavement counselling. Peer counsellors, once again, could alleviate some of the educators' pressures and their training thus needs to be addressed within the education system.

5.3 Recommendations

In corroboration with the findings presented in this inquiry, related recommendations are made. These recommendations, however, are by no means exhaustive. The aim is essentially to propose strategies that may lead to the enhanced support of learners who are from child-headed families, as their numbers are on the rise and schools will be more readily confronted with their care over the coming years within the South African context.

As identified by the findings the need for financial management was raised, as conflict may arise between siblings regarding household expenditures. Corroborating with outside organisations and non-government organisations with regard to the development of community centres and sustainable food gardens could help alleviate the burden of obtaining food.

Although school uniforms are not compulsory, learners would like to feel part of their school communities. Members from the school based support teams could encourage learners from the schools to donate out-grown or old but still wearable clothes and shoes, in other words establishing school uniform and clothing banks.

Once again as stressed from the findings, adolescent learners from child-headed families are in definite need of emotional care and support after the deaths of their parent(s). In ideal situations with the establishment of community–based care centres, the SBST and peer counsellors' needed emotional counselling can be provided within one of these sub-systems.

Through family counselling sessions provided by an NGO, social workers or an educational psychologist on staff at the District Based Support Teams, the child-headed family could be provided with the opportunity to express and work through their emotional experiences during and after the decease of their parent(s). Once again, the well-being of all the members of the child-headed family as well as the head of the family will need to be monitored, preferably by school-based guardians.

I thought it is appropriate for educational psychologists to support the School-Based Support Teams in drawing up a document with regard the procedures that need to be followed as soon as the school is informed of the death of a learner's parents. After establishing that the learners and siblings would be forming a child-headed family, the responsible educator from the School Based Support Team would need to contact the Department of Social Development in order to apply for a possible relief grant for the family. Relevant departments or organisations could be contacted to offer the needed bereavement counselling if indeed the teacher has not been trained in this regard. Followed by a home visit by the social worker and teacher, the school could avail them of the living conditions of the learners in order to re-evaluate the needed support. An information sheet could be given with all the relevant community organisations that could assist or be contacted in times of need. These are just some suggestions; as such a support-safety-net will need to be appropriately co-ordinated and monitored.

It is important not only for the staff to know of the function of School-Based Support Team but also for the learners from a school to be informed as well. In doing so learners from child-headed families become aware of supportive resources within the school they could utilise in order to manage the burden of being part of a child-headed family.

The broader community is social contexts where all learners as well as learners from child-headed families attain the needed interpersonal skills and social support they need to survive uncertain life circumstances. The literature review as well as the findings suggested that township communities within the South African context are not necessarily safe environments where adolescent learners could reach their developmental outcomes. With regard to the capacity for community-support-structures to be enhanced, community forums could be asked to identify possible developmental goals they would like to achieve in order for their communities to become easier environments to raise children in (Barry & Garbarino, 1997:79). In collaboration with other government departments, such as the Departments of Education, Social Development and Health, a community project could then be supported for instance to address the safety of learners or to establish recreational facilities in their communities. The community project should be identified and initiated by the community members and a policing community forum in order to start securing the environments learners and especially child-headed families live in.

As mentioned in the literature review, learners from impoverished communities run the risk of being less exposed to appropriate role models and are confronted with high unemployment rates. As suggested by the findings, the participants from the inquiry have high aspirations to become successful in the future. Keeping this in mind mentorship programmes from

industries, small businesses and community members could be initiated by the relevant schools in collaboration with the various District Based Support Teams. Educational Psychologists at the District Based Support Teams together with the Life Orientation educators from schools most in need of career guidance could contact the surrounding businesses, industries and tertiary institutions to address learners especially in rural areas with regard to the work place, different careers, short courses available and the application process. Learners would then also need to know the requirements when applying for financial assistance from the various institutions. Although these suggestions seem obvious to some communities, career guidance, development and support is still terribly neglected in most schools especially within rural township. It is hoped that this discrepancy would be addressed within the new Further Education and Training curriculum guidelines, as Life Orientation is a compulsory learning area.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter comprised of a summary of the research process and relevant findings that were indicated within this inquiry. Thereafter possible recommendations, linked to the findings have been made in the hope of further supporting the aim of this inquiry.

Policies and initiatives from various NGO's, Education and Social development departments are being developed and implemented to support learners from child-headed families. Thus far, however, the support measures within the socio-economic constraints of the country focus on the learners' daily living needs and less on their emotional experiences. Furthermore, learners form rural communities are even more at risk of not receiving adequate support due to the migration of community members to nearby cities and towns in the hope of employment possibilities. The poor of the poorest would remain behind, widening the gap with regard to receiving proper care and support, not only for members from child-headed families but also for those communities as a whole. Clearly the most effective interventions

are those that are coordinated at multiple levels and social contexts of these learners, with the

rural communities as set priority.

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ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN

FAMILY BACKGROUND

1. Ages of children

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....
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....
....

2. Number of children in the family

....
....
....
....

3. How long have you been staying home alone?

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....
....

4. What conditions claimed your parent's lives?

....
....
....
....
....

5. Why would you not live with the members of the extended family?...

....
....
....
....

ROLES

6. Identify the roles that you had to assume after the death of your parents:

Child care	
Basic provision	
Family maintenance	
Leadership	
Decision- making	

7. Explain the extent of the role that you played

....
....
....
....
....
....

8. How are the roles assigned?...

....
....
....
....

SETTING FAMILY RULES
9. What rules are made?

....
....
....
....
....
....

10. Who sets limits for behavior? (Age, Sex and Position in the family)......................................

....
....

11. Who sets family rules? (Age, Sex and position in the family)

....
....
....

NEED FOR SURVIVAL
12. What do you usually eat?..

....
....
....

13. Who provides for food?...

....
....
....

FINANCIAL NEED

14. What is the family's source of income?..

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....

15. What is the amount of the income?...

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16. How is money spent?..

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....

CONFLICT WITHIN THE FAMILY

17. Do you sometimes have conflict?..

18. What is the conflict about?

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19. How do you deal with conflict?...

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....

....

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SCHOOL

20. Do all children attend school?...

21. If not, what are the reasons for not attending school?

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22. How are the school needs met?...

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23. Do you get any support from the school?

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RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RELIGIONS SYSTEM

24. Are you affiliated to a church or religious group?...

....

...

25. What support has the church offered?...

....

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....

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE EXERCISE