

CHILD ADULTS / ADULT CHILDREN: GROWING UP IN
KZN.

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DECLARATION

Submitted in partial fulfilment (*delete whichever is applicable*) of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science, in the Graduate Programme in

Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was not used (*delete whichever is applicable*) and that my Supervisor was informed of the identity and details of my editor. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Social Science in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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Abstract

Although it is acknowledged in the Southern African literature that children living in conditions of poverty have always assumed more household responsibilities, the AIDS epidemic has exacerbated this and significantly changed the nature of childhood as an increasing number of children face life without parents. The study sought to gain insight into the experiential lives of six “child” heads of households and their siblings and to explore, in particular, how they construct their sense of self and family. For the purposes of the study a child-headed household was deemed a household in which a child of 18 or under or still in school was the household head in the absence of any other dependable, permanent adult figure.

The study used a narrative approach and thematic analysis and the results emerging from the children’s accounts of themselves were focused around the core themes of adult responsibility in the absence of adult status and relationships with adults in the extended family and wider community. The idea of children or adolescents competently running households, taking responsibility for themselves and their futures and adopting a more democratic and shared means of decision making, further challenges conventional conceptions of the ‘borders’ between childhood and adulthood and family structure that have been contested and shifting through history. However, being on the front line of social change comes at a cost. Challenging society’s popular understanding of children as passive, dependent and innocent positions these young people outside of the norm and what they report is that they feel alone, unheard and victimised. The findings are discussed within the context of Burman’s critique of psychology’s traditional theoretical notions of universal and innately driven development and a re-conceptualisation of children’s experiences in terms of the context in which they live, and Crossley’s perspective on narrative which emphasises agency grounded within cultural forms of sense-making.

A new way of discussing these unconventionally structured families is also presented through the reconfiguration of relationships between family members, recognising connections that span generations and across different household spaces.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa has led to an increasing number of children being orphaned and a decreasing number of adults in communities where there is a high risk of HIV infection (Foster, Makufa, Drew & Kralovec, 1997) as adults in the prime of their working lives are also the most vulnerable to infection (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004). According to Walker et al (2004), child or adolescent headed households have emerged as a direct impact of HIV/AIDS on families and households in South Africa. However, Desmond, Richter, Makiwane & Amoateng (2003) argue that households headed by children or adolescents existed prior to the AIDS epidemic in South Africa, most likely already common as a result of migrant labour that became very prominent during South Africa's Apartheid era (Jones, 1993). Either way, child and adolescent headed households are believed to be on the increase, (Walker et al, 2004; Richter, Manegold & Pather, 2005) and there is a great deal more research required in this area (Richter et al, 2005) particularly in terms of understanding the roles that children play and household, family and support structures (e.g. Walker et al, 2004; Richter et al, 2005; Desmond et al, 2003). In particular, there appears to be an under-representation of the situation from the perspectives of the children themselves. Listening to how children in these roles themselves conceptualise childhood and construct their sense of self and family has important implications for informing policy and programme interventions and changing conceptions of childhood.

Although it is acknowledged in the Southern African literature that children living in conditions of poverty have always assumed more household responsibilities such as domestic work, child care of siblings and contributing to household income, (Jones, 1993; Ramphela, 2002; Reynolds, 1991; Richter et al, 2005) Walker et al (2004) argue that the AIDS epidemic has exacerbated this and significantly changed the nature of childhood as an increasing number of children face life without parents. Girl children, in particular, are identified in the research involving disadvantaged communities in Southern Africa as having less free time to play, learn, and form their identities in preparation for adulthood because they are more burdened with domestic chores (Jones, 1993; Ramphela, 2002; Walker et al, 2004; Reynolds, 1991).

In contemporary society there is a tendency to separate the world of children from that of adults and to view childhood as a period of dependency, incompetence and immaturity; a time for “irresponsibility, indulgence and play” (Burman, 2008, p. 11). The emergence of the phenomenon of child-headed households challenges this view because heading households is very ‘un-childlike’ behaviour (Aitken & Robson cited in Francis-Chizororo, 2007) in terms of conventional conceptions of childhood.

In her study on child-headed households in Zimbabwe, Francis-Chizororo (2007) emphasises the ‘in-betweenness’ of these children’s situations in that they were neither fully children nor adults. They were expected to behave as adults by taking on the work and roles of adults but they were still treated like children in terms of having less power and not being given credit for moral or social competence within their community. It is useful to consider this in terms of Burman’s (2008) idea that the power differential between adult and child and the common discourse of the dependency and impotence of children, perpetuates the notion that adults are competent and potent by comparison. Further, Walker et al’s (2004) assertion that the boundaries between adulthood and childhood are fluid and context specific, is demonstrated in the example of children who were often at the forefront of the political struggle for democracy in South Africa.

This research project is informed by Burman’s (1994; 2008) critique of psychology’s traditional developmental theories, according to which human development is based on the idea of progress through a number of stages. Erikson’s work has been particularly influential in the conceptualisation of adolescence as the phase of life that bridges the “gap between the security of childhood and the autonomy of adulthood (Santrock, 1995, p. 393). His psychosocial stages outline a process of identity development in which the ideal end state is a strong sense of individuality. Burman challenges traditional theoretical notions of universal and innately driven development such as this and provides, instead, a basis for rethinking children’s experiences in terms of the contexts in which they live.

In respect of the methodological framework of this study, it is primarily informed by Michelle Crossley’s (2000a) approach, a narrative approach that falls within the qualitative research paradigm. Crossley’s perspective acknowledges that self and

identity are grounded in cultural forms of sense making (Crossley, 2000b). Her approach attempts to reintroduce a sense of agency to the individual as a story-teller recording their own experience. She acknowledges the notion that people have an internal sense of themselves as a self (Crossley, 2000b). Crossley provides a suitable approach for this study in light of the fact that these are children displaying remarkable competence and resilience by taking on the full responsibility of caring for themselves and their siblings against very difficult odds and despite society's perception of children as weak, vulnerable and incompetent.

The broad research questions for this study can be formulated as follows:

1.1 How do children from child headed households interact with adults in their extended families, communities and the wider world around them? What are their existing support networks?

The concept of child and adolescent headed homes presents a very different picture from the social normative perspective of family structure based on the Western idea of nuclear family as well as the broader African notion of family which places more emphasis on the extended family. The role of „significant' adults in the lives of these children is one of the issues that will be explored in this study.

1.2 How do children construct their identities as heads of households and decision makers? Furthermore, how do child heads of households make sense of or negotiate the contradiction of assuming adult responsibilities in the absence of adult status?

Experimentation and exploration are viewed as important activities in adolescents' lives as they play, learn and form their identities in preparation for adulthood. However, in the lives of children who are burdened by excessive household responsibilities there is little scope for teenage experimentation (Ramphela, 2002). If one recognises children's agency then it is important to ask how children in child-headed households are preparing themselves for adulthood with limited guidance from adults (Francis-Chizororo, 2007).

1.3 What are children of child-headed families' perceptions of the barriers and opportunities that exist in terms of their integration into wider society and their hopes, plans and dreams for their futures?

Although the structural barriers of poverty and the absence of nurturing parents are very real in the lives of these children and require both a political and theoretical response, different children respond differently to their situations and individual action has a part to play. It is therefore worthwhile to ask how children themselves can act in the world to make a better future for themselves. This question of agency is particularly significant in the developing South African context where many families live in conditions of extreme poverty and inequality.

1.4 How does gender impact on the experience of children in child-headed families?

Adolescence, especially, is an important time for the development of ideas about gender roles and relations (Erikson cited in Thomas, 1996). The project therefore explored whether gender has an impact on the roles that children adopt in child-headed households and their experiences of themselves.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Childhood as a social construction

As an alternative to the traditional approach to developmental psychology, with its claims to universality, Burman (1994) suggests the consideration of contexts in which people grow and change. She provides a basis for re-theorising children's experiences in context, acknowledging the existence of diversity in the experience of growing up. Likewise, Dawes & Donald (1994) assert that children are not only natural objects, but also social and historical subjects, and that consideration of the multiplicity of children's experiences is key to understanding children's functioning and development. Traditionally, developmental psychology as a discipline was dominated by the idea that development is a natural process and a universal phenomenon, therefore little consideration was given to issues beyond the biological dimensions of childhood. The developmental model in psychology views childhood as a series of natural stages in human development. Accordingly, children's progress is observed as a course of events that pave the way to successful maturity, of which adulthood is the ideal end state. In other words, children are required to negotiate and master one particular stage of development before moving onto the next, more sophisticated one and abnormal outcomes are traced back to critical moments in development. Archard (2004) asserts that this understanding of children implies that children are unfinished adults. The idea of progress through a number of stages can be seen in traditional theories of development such as Piaget's stages of cognitive development and Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. For Piaget, the state of adult maturity is defined as the capacity for formal operational, or abstract and hypothetical thinking. The culmination of successful progression through Erikson's psychosocial stages, or identity formation, is a sound sense of one's own identity (Thomas, 1996). Burman (1994) questions this uni-linear picture of development and challenges traditional theoretical notions of universal and innately driven development.

Burman (2004) further asserts that boundaries between adulthood and childhood are socially defined and more fluid and context-specific than traditional developmental psychological theories propose. Psychologists generally state that childhood ends at

puberty when adolescence begins, usually in the teenage years. There is, however, no clear guideline for when adolescence ends, although some say that it is when children are financially independent and autonomous from their parents (Santrock, 1995). In Reynolds's (1991) study of children living in a rural community in the Zambezi valley she noted that girls' adolescence ended with marriage and or pregnancy, and that girls could therefore be granted full adult status in their community from the age of 14 if they married or became pregnant. For boys, adolescence could extend into the 20's and would ordinarily end with formal wage earning or marriage. Francis-Chizororo (2007) also found that, according to Shona culture, independent living is associated with marriage, particularly in the case of girls. Reynolds (1991) points out that if adolescents need a certain time span to acquire complex developmental achievements, as is implied by developmental theory, then an important question in light of this example is how girls fit this into a few years while this life stage is extended for boys.

The legal system is particularly rigid in terms of its age-related definitions. It distinguishes a clear line where childhood ends and adulthood begins. For example, in South Africa until 30 June 2007, minority ended at the age of twenty one. However, Section 71 of the new Children's Act was implemented on 1 July 2007 and lowered the general age of majority to eighteen (Slack, Strobe & Mamashela, 2007). Nevertheless communities and society do not necessarily recognise an eighteen-year-old as an adult merely because that is what the legislation says (Francis-Chizororo, 2007). As Burman's (2004) argument asserts, the real life 'border' between childhood and adulthood is far less distinct than that.

According to Burman (1994) particular views or notions of children and childhood are constructed within a particular social context. It is, therefore, necessary to be aware of the context (interpersonal, cultural, historical and political) that produces the concept of 'the child' as well as the context in which children themselves live (Burman, 1994). Although children have always existed, 'childhood' as a phase of life is a relatively recent concept. The nature and experience of childhood is linked to shifts and changes in society. For example, the notion of childhood as qualitatively different from the experiential world of adults appears to have emerged with the process of modernisation and industrialisation in Europe and North America. According to Gittins (cited in Burman, 1994), in pre-industrial Europe, productive activity centred

around the home, and all family members were involved, with different functions accorded dependent on age and skill. Children were involved in adult space working alongside adults. With industrialisation and the emergence of increasingly differentiated jobs, education and schooling became important and childhood emerged as a qualitatively different phase of life from adulthood (Hengst, 2001). Hengst (2001) cites Quortrup who talks about child labour being replaced with school learning during this period, an occurrence that divided labour among the generations. He argues that, in an industrial society, school learning is as central to the labour market as the manual wage labour in which children partook in pre-industrial societies. In an expanding economy higher educational qualifications are normally associated with better occupational opportunities (Power, 1984 in Heaven, 2001) which meant that schooling became necessary for the average child in order to prepare them for the work place. Hengst asserts that:

The term “childhood” refers to the specific construction of which the crucial aspect is to liberate children from wage labour and to provide them instead with play and learning experiences qualitatively distinct from the experiences acquired by adults (2001, p. 13).

Hengst (2001) proposes a further shift in the form of childhood in contemporary society from the notion of childhood and intergenerational relationships that emerged out of the labour or industrial society of 18th and 19th century Europe and North America. He claims that children in contemporary society are no longer orientated towards a labour or industrial society in the way that they think, feel and act. Previously, labour in industrial societies shaped individual life courses and key institutions, but this is changing due to the developments in technology and science that mean that people’s material needs can be met without labour determining their lives in the same way as in early industrial society. Through a number of surveys Hengst identifies that young people are tending towards life plans in which occupation and employment continue to play an important role but are more fluid and open, and no longer dominant in defining their identities. It is important to realise that Hengst is writing in Europe, and that his research was conducted in the context of the middle classes, but in South Africa there is a large labour force and a large number of

„unskilled’ people who do not have the opportunity of being creative and selective about the work they do. The shift that Hengst speaks about may be identified among the minority; that is the more privileged sector of South African society. However, the majority of South African lives are still controlled by the necessity of work to survive. As Burman (2008) points out, the experiences of people living in the same country or region are not homogenous and it is therefore impossible to draw a distinction in experiences according to geographic and political areas. Although we speak in terms of first and third world countries, as she says, there are many first and third world settings that fall within countries that are named generally as either first or third world. In South Africa in particular, the socio-political consequences of the Apartheid system have lingered, meaning that certain „race’ groups are still at a structural disadvantage relative to others (Preston-Whyte & Louw, 1990), and that generations of children, although from one nation, have grown up with distinctly different experiences and attitudes from and about each other (Reynolds, 1990). Reynolds (1990) states that the overwhelming evidence from studies shows how isolated from each other the children of different communities are.

Hood-Williams (2001) points out that childhood has long been accepted as a social construct since Aries’s seminal work. Aries (1962) states that the idea of childhood did not exist in medieval society and that there was a lack of awareness of the particular nature that distinguishes the child from the adult. Today, on the other hand, there is a tendency to separate the world of children from that of adults and to view childhood as a period of dependency and immaturity, an idea that emerged in Western society towards the end of the nineteenth century. Burman agrees that the dominant notion of childhood in contemporary society is that of “irresponsibility, indulgence and play” (2008, p. 11) and that the common assumption is that children are dependent on adults. She theorises that contemporary Western ideas about child–adult relations are organised around at least three bipolar dimensions: Innocence and experience; dependence and autonomy (adults have responsibilities and power); and spontaneous and reflective (adults envy the freedom to be spontaneous and creative, which is characteristic of childhood, when compared with the self regulation of adulthood). She highlights the power differential between adult and child and the common discourse of the dependency and impotence of children that perpetuates the notion that adults are competent and potent by comparison (2008). The developmental

perspective in psychology substantiates the conception that childhood is a „special’ time and that children occupy a vulnerable position in society. This is attributed to the traditional, natural explanation of the substantial changes that children undergo physically, socially and psychologically during this period.

According to Burman (2008) real children fail to live up to the fantasised notion of childhood. Those that do not fit this picture are those that most deviate from the white, middle class, the children that formed the sample of the generation of the scientifically naturalised model of child development. She says that children who do not fit this norm contradict the model of the “happy, playing, discovering child” (2008, p. 157). Examples of such children include those that engage in paid work and those that live away from cross-generational families. These children challenge society’s popular understanding of what children should do and be. As a result, society has powerful reactions to children who are active and autonomous, and who do not fit our common conceptions of children as passive, dependent and innocent (Burman, 2008).

2.2 Challenging conceptions of children as passive and dependent

Hengst (2001) claims that the intergenerational division of labour affects the structure of households. For instance, increased employment of women for financial reasons as a result of raised material standards of living, and due to individualisation, has implications for the dependence of children on adults: children have greater independence, and more choices and freedom. Hengst’s studies focused on middle class children in single parent and double income families where children are left with free reign of the home for a portion of the day. He argues that children’s independence has emerged as well as parents’ dependence on this independence. Zelizer (cited in Hengst, 2001) states that it is unlikely that women will return to full time housework, meaning that traditional role allocations and the notion of childhood will have to be revised. Erler (cited in Hengst, 2001) claims that in the United States 6 to 19 year olds are not only caring for themselves, but also for their parents, which she says can be seen in the example of children taking on the household chores of grocery shopping, which she says is evident from the fact that the advertising that was directed at housewives is now being directed at children instead. She highlights the

contradiction of a country in which child labour is otherwise condemned and outlawed, but where children are taking on an enormous amounts of responsibility in double income households but that their „labour’ is accepted and admired in this context.

While Erler seems to imply that this situation is exploitative, Hengst (2001) argues that these children are more independent and have more power in such situations. He argues that these children are their own „bosses’ in the home and often make consumer choices regarding what to buy for the home in terms of groceries and domestic products. He states that having to do some household chores is a small price to pay for freedom from parental supervision and extensive control over their own space and time. Reynolds (1991), writing in a Southern African context similarly identifies that adolescents, in particular, living in rural communities, use tasks to escape surveillance and meet friends beside the stream or in the bush. Solberg, (1990 in Hengst, 2001) theorises that children in this situation, having the home as their own domain for part of the day and a degree of liberation from parental supervision, grow up socially quite differently from children that have a parent at home and who are deprived of self-determination through being under constant surveillance. His argument concurs with the view that children’s social age is advanced by negotiating their own use of domestic space. This, in turn, implies that children are considerably more competent and capable than adults give them credit for. He claims that children are not merely taking on household chores, but that they have increased control over their own time and space, the ability to spend time exclusively with their friends and access to media and other resources. Solberg writes from the perspective of children and notes that children in her survey explicitly welcomed the opportunities for social growth that they attain in these circumstances. Morrow (cited in Hengst, 2001) claims that the traditional image of children as dependent is a social construction that obscures the fact that children are very much a part of the labour market even if this is only at the level of mutual dependency between family members. Such domestic labour is however heavily gendered. In terms of non-economic labour, girl children, in particular, are identified in the research involving disadvantaged communities in Southern Africa as having less free time to play, learn, and form their identities in preparation for adulthood because they are more burdened with domestic chores (Jones, 1993; Ramphela, 2002; Walker et al, 2004; Reynolds, 1991). Being tied to

their homes through their domestic responsibilities, girls' movements are restricted. Boys, on the other hand, generally have more freedom and a wider domain to explore (Reynolds, 1991).

It is striking to draw a contrast between the potential benefits, in terms of increased independence and maturity, to the European children central to Hengst's focus that have less adult supervision in their lives, with the plight of orphaned heads of households in poverty stricken and AIDS ravaged areas of Southern Africa. There are examples of children in this situation that are competently leading households, taking care of younger children or sick relatives and making complex decisions on a day to day basis. Walker et al (2004) argue that, in South Africa, many children living in conditions of extreme poverty do not have the luxury of experiencing carefree childhoods because they are required to assume the full responsibility of their family's survival from a very young age. Again, it is a common theme that girl children, in particular, are more likely to take on the burden of caring for sick adult family members and for other children (Reynolds, 1991).

There is a clear contradiction when considering these young people, bearing the burden of substantial responsibility on their young shoulders, in contrast with parents in a study conducted by Valentine (1997) with English, middle-class parents, who said that they did not generally expect their older children to care for their younger ones because they felt that their children should be treated as individuals rather than as carers for each other. This provides evidence of the common Western, middle-class norm that childhood should be a time when children should be free from the responsibilities of adulthood. According to Preston-Whyte and Louw (1990), in Western thinking and literature childhood is generally conceptualised as a time of innocence and idyllic irresponsibility when individuals should be protected from the harsh realities of life.

2.3 Adults and children: The unequal distribution of power

The freedom of choice and empowered position of children of affluence spoken about by Hengst (2001) cannot be enjoyed by children bearing the full burden of running households in the poverty stricken areas of South Africa. Their lives are, instead,

constrained by a shortage of resources and extreme vulnerability. The burden of their responsibilities, in addition to the scarcity of family resources, often results in them dropping out of school and vulnerability to overwork and sexual exploitation (Richter et al, 2005). Here it is useful to draw on the theme of children's dependence on adults and the vulnerable position this puts them in. Adults hold the key to some much needed relief through government grants but the bureaucracy gets in the way. The child support grant was introduced in the aftermath of the Apartheid era in South Africa and aimed to provide basic assistance to very poor families with young children under the age of nine (Lund, 2007). Although the South African department of Welfare has acknowledged the existence of child-headed households and has responded by changing the law to allow under-age youth access to child-support grants, in order to obtain the grants, they need to provide documentation in the form of birth and death certificates and identity documents. In a region "where 70% of births are not registered these children often fall through the Welfare safety net" (Walker et al, 2004, p. 58). This appears contradictory in light of the amount of effort put in by government to writing policies that are informed by the children's rights approach and that focus on the special needs of children. Children that do manage to gather together the required documentation to obtain government grants, or who have received an inheritance from deceased parents are then often vulnerable to relatives or friends stealing from them. These children may also be vulnerable to people taking advantage of them in terms of sexual exploitation. In considering these things, the special emphasis that our society places on the importance of childhood, epitomised by the widespread slogan that "children are our future", is brought under scrutiny.

Hood-Williams (2001) raises the issue of new "child-centred" principles of social control operating in Western schools that have been developing as a result of the influence of new middle-class groups since the mid 1960's. These new principles take on a less authoritarian stance and allow children the right to exercise choice and autonomy. According to this more "child-centred" approach to childrearing, examined by Newson and Newson (1976 in Hood-Williams, 2001) children are recognised as individuals with rights and feelings worthy of respect. Hood-Williams (2001) points out, however, that even if children are treated as if they are independent individuals and given choice and autonomy, the underlying reality is that they still have to conform to the will of adults: The point he makes is that the structural relationship

between adults and children and the unequal distribution of power remains. In other words, children are still vulnerable and more open to exploitation in terms of their size, inexperience and financial dependence.

2.4 Children as vulnerable

Linked to society's conceptions of the innocence and dependence of children is the image of children in the contemporary Western world which perceives them to be vulnerable and incompetent in public spaces. Hood-Williams (2001) argues that children are becoming more controlled, supervised, and restricted in important ways as a result of reduced outside time and space due to an increased sense amongst parents of real or imagined danger. He asserts that children need to be constantly within sight or within particular distances, and that confinement is part of the everyday parameters of contemporary childhood. Parents feel that they have to be more protective over their children than their parents had been over them because they perceive children to be more at risk in today's society (Valentine, 1997). Children's safety in public spaces is high on the agenda in the UK and USA. This is fuelled by high profile cases of child abductions and murders. Swart-Kruger and Chawla (2002 in Moses, 2005), conducting research in the South African context, also found that today's children live more constrained lives due to fears surrounding the threats of crime, violence and sexual risk. Hood-Williams (2001) writing about the current generation of children in Europe identifies a shift in their experience towards higher levels of supervision and less opportunity and time for unsupervised time outside the home. He also concludes that this is due to parents' fears of urban dangers such as traffic and paedophiles. It is clear from this that safety is an important part of popular discourse about children and that adults appear anxious about the amount of independence and spatial freedom that children are granted.

In popular discourse, rules governing children's space are visibly gendered. For instance, Hood-Williams (2001) points to the common opinion that girls are more vulnerable and should therefore be subject to more restriction than boys in order to protect them from potential harm by adult strangers. The irony here is the existing evidence that many cases of abuse occur within the home in „private' or protected space and are perpetrated by familiar adults (Hood-Williams, 2001).

In spite of the commonly held view that girl children are more vulnerable than boy children in public spaces, Valentine's (1997) study conducted in northwest England produced some interesting results in its exploration of how parents determine the personal geographies of their sons and daughters differentially, and how their concerns about the safety of their boys and girls differ. Many studies (e.g. Hart, 1979 and Matthews, 1987, cited in Valentine, 1997) found that boys were allowed further away from home unaccompanied by an adult and to spend more time outside than girls. Hart (1979 in Valentine, 1997) states that this differential treatment of boys and girls by their parents in terms of children's spatial ranges is as a result of there being a greater concern among parents for girls' safety. The explanation attributed to this in a number of studies is that girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and less able to defend themselves than boys (Saegert & Hart, 1978; Moore, 1986; Steinberg, 1987; Peters, 1994 in Valentine, 1997).

Valentine's study (1997), however, found that although some parents maintained this more 'traditional' view of girls being more vulnerable than boys, it emerged that many parents were equally concerned about the vulnerability of both their sons and daughters in public spaces. Therefore there appears to be an increasing concern among these parents that boys are also at risk.

Valentine (1997) found that many parents felt that before puberty boys were just as vulnerable as girls. This may be due to a number of recent high profile cases of boys being abducted, molested and murdered. After puberty parents tended to feel that boys were more physically able to defend themselves and their concern about the potential threat of abduction and sexual assault decreased. However their concerns about their sons' safety did not seem to disappear altogether, but instead they took on a different form. That is, older boys were perceived to be increasingly vulnerable to violence from peers and other adolescents (Valentine, 1997). Parents' fear for their teenage sons appeared to centre around the threat of random male violence at football grounds, in pubs and on the streets. Questionnaires and interviews carried out amongst parents from a middle-class urban metropolitan borough in Greater Manchester as part of Valentine's study (1997), revealed concern over a local problem with gangs. Significantly Valentine (1997) pointed out that, in this regard, parents'

concerns were consistent with current statistics revealing that young men were most at risk of interpersonal violence. Similar findings have emerged from recent research in underprivileged South African communities through the Human Sciences Research Council's Fatherhood Project in that, in the widespread absence of fathers, mothers are unable to control their sons beyond the age of 12 and gang violence is becoming a problem amongst adolescent boys, thereby increasing the danger for children in these areas as both potential victims and perpetrators (A. Bhana, personal communication, May 11, 2006)

An additional finding in Valentine's study (1997) was that parents commonly felt that their daughters aged 8 to 11 were more responsible than boys, and, as pointed out by Wyness (1994 in Valentine, 1997) parents stress the importance of children developing 'common sense' before they can be left to negotiate public space on their own. Boys of the same age were seen by many parents to be immature and irrational and therefore incapable of negotiating public space safely.

An important question concerns how much autonomy is required by children, in terms of negotiating their own space, for optimal development. Children evidently need to be protected from the dangers inherent in today's society but, as adults of tomorrow, they also need to learn to cope effectively and independently in the outside world. The example provided of orphaned child heads of households represents a lack of parental supervision in the extreme and the resultant detrimental effects on the futures of children burdened with too much responsibility. But, at the opposite extreme, it is acknowledged that overprotecting children is likely to prolong their dependence on others and leave them ill equipped to function effectively in the world as adults and live meaningful lives.

2.5 Children's rights: Freedom versus protection

Legal instruments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, view children as fundamentally different from adults and therefore with needs that are distinct from those of adults. It is argued that, as a result, they should be entitled to certain basic rights (Archard, 2004). The most significant aspect of the convention is that it is based on the central idea that children are moral and legal subjects with

agency and a voice that should be listened to (Archard, 2004). The rights accorded children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are the rights that Western liberal societies think it important to give to children. Furthermore, they are defined by adults.

Reynolds (1990), writing in the South African context, also points to the issue of polarised opinion around the protection of children versus their rights. Freeman (1983 in Reynolds, 1990) outlines the two positions as follows: On the one hand there is the notion of society's responsibility to provide optimal environments and services (that is, what is good for children) and on the other hand, the position of child liberationists that emphasises children's rights and asserts that children should be able to exercise greater control over their own environments and have the freedom to decide what is good for them themselves. This presents a challenge to the concept of children's rights in terms of its practical impact. According to Mnookin (1985, in Reynolds, 1990), the idea of children's rights poses a dilemma due to the fact that children do not have the experience and maturity to decide what is in their own best interests. This unresolved dichotomy means, for example, that parents are under pressure to both protect their children from public dangers by restricting their independence, but also to allow them the freedom to develop streetwise skills and thereby become competent at negotiating public space alone (Valentine, 1997).

According to the findings of Valentine's study conducted in England (1997), middle-class mothers appear to be more protective than mothers from lower income families. Most likely, the reason for this is that mothers from working class families are in less of a position to focus their time and energy on regulating their children's whereabouts. It is more common for children from working class families to spend more time unsupervised and with other neighbourhood children whilst their parents are out at work due to the lack of affordability of child care. A parallel may be drawn here with children from lower socio-economic groups in South Africa that are left unsupervised much of the time while their parents work. It is commonplace for children to take themselves to school and return to an empty house when they have finished their lessons for the day (Preston-Whyte & Louw, 1990). In these communities parents often work at great distances from their homes. Migrant labour developed on a large scale partly due the Group Areas Act (Kirkwood, 1951) in place

during the time of Apartheid rule. In practice, this legislation meant that many black workers were forced to live in remote designated, racially segregated areas, far from the economic centres where employment opportunities existed. Even in contemporary South Africa, poorer communities still mostly live furthest from work opportunities, in rural places or in dormitory townships. Although Hood-Williams (2001) emphasises the freedom accorded children whose parents work allowing them free range of their homes for part of the day, in the context of poorer areas in South Africa this situation is also likely to result in children being more vulnerable in a climate rife with violence against children. Although in traditional African families the extended family network played an important role in child care support, social transition as a result of integration into the capitalist economy has led to the weakening of traditional kinship systems (Russell, 2004). In poorer African communities there are many more single mothers that have no choice but to leave their children at home alone when they go off to work. Additionally there is, of course, the example of the growing number of orphaned children, whose parents have died, many of AIDS, and who are left alone to fend for themselves and their younger siblings.

2.6 Children and socialisation

Although children are perceived by adults to be vulnerable and in need of protection on one hand, they are also seen to be unruly, wild and even dangerous on the other. This is linked to the idea that children, as „unfinished adults’ (Archard, 2004) are not fully socialised beings and they should therefore be under constant surveillance by adults as moral authority figures. The perception of the potential threat that unsupervised children may pose is visibly gendered. According to Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody (2001), in the past, the moral and social regulation of teenage girls in particular focused almost exclusively on the regulation of their sexuality. Hudson (1983 cited in Walkerdine et al, 2001) asserts that the dominant attitude towards teenage girls is that girls are unable to control their sexual behaviour and as a result it needs to be regulated and controlled authoritatively, preferably by their parents. Protecting the „purity’ of teenage girls is important in the light of conventional femininity. As Holland et al (p. 6 1998 cited in Walkerdine et al, 2001) say: “To be conventionally feminine is to appear sexually unknowing, to aspire to a relationship, to let sex “happen”, to trust to love, and to make men happy.” Aside from the

conventional idea of femininity and the ideal of young girls preserving themselves for their husbands, there are also very real risks associated with teenage, premarital sex in the form of unwanted pregnancies and the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. In African cultures premarital sex is also heavily sanctioned. Adolescent sexuality is perceived to be powerful and potentially socially destructive and that is why historically measures were taken to regulate and control it (Walker et al, 2004). Walker et al (2004) claim that the AIDS epidemic reveals the extent of the breakdown of parental authority in African communities and the lack of control over adolescent sexuality. They argue that the resurgence of the traditional practice of virginity testing in the 1990's in Kwazulu-Natal, whereby young unmarried women found to have had sexual intercourse were publicly shamed, can be interpreted as a desperate attempt by older women to reassert their authority over younger women's sexuality and to control the potential risks. It is interesting to highlight, as Walker et al (2004) do, that men are not given any responsibility for preserving their own virginity or that of young girls.

Adults' perspectives on the threats posed to boys take a different angle with a concern over antisocial behaviour associated with aggression and gang violence (A. Bhana, personal communication, May 11, 2006), and risk-taking behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse (Walker et al, 2004). It is particularly interesting to consider the emergent findings in the research associated with the Human Sciences Research Council's Fatherhood Project that mothers are unable to control their sons once they become teenagers and are more susceptible to peer pressure. Walker et al (2004) found that norms and expectations around masculinity were found to be associated with the idea of men being dominant and in control, and risk taking behaviours such as drug and alcohol use, multiple sexual partners and violence. In the South African media African men particularly are portrayed as, at best neglectful and uncaring and at worst, abusive. This negative image permeates everyday South African talk. For example, Hunter (2006) points to a prominent media stereotype that African men impregnate women and then abandon them. This is the image of men and fathers that teenage boys are left with. It should be pointed out here that in the example of attempting to regain control over teenage girls' sexuality (Walker et al, 2004) and in the example of attempting to keep young boys under control (A. Bhana, personal communication, May 11, 2006), it is the mothers and the women that are responsible.

Mothers are held as primarily responsible for socialising children (Burman, 1994), in the context of AIDS ravaged communities in Southern Africa, where mothers are dead or ill, their young daughters or ageing grandmothers take their place.

2.7 Children and agency

Despite the point discussed at length that children are vulnerable, dependent and subject to the control of adults, it is important to note that children also display a great deal of creativity, resilience and enterprise (Reynolds, 1990). Moving beyond psychologically based models of childhood as a period of socialisation it is important to consider that children are active in constructing their social environments by interacting with adults and other children (Schildkrout, 2002 in Moses, 2005). Valentine (1997) agrees that socialisation does not merely happen through a process of adults acting on passive children. There is an interaction in which children negotiate and resist, and contribute to „creating’ their parents or caregivers too. According to Fay’s notion of relational selves „becoming a person is a process of adopting a set of norms and ideals that define one’s role in a pattern of social relations’ (1996, p. 40). He explains that identity formation is partly a process of self-differentiation which requires another against which one can differentiate oneself. He claims that individuals are not passively acted on by outside forces in their social worlds, but that they respond to their environments. In other words, he states: “We need others to be ourselves but we also need ourselves to be ourselves” (Fay, 1996, p. 48). Fay (1996) claims that people on the periphery that do not fit the norm, such as children participating in the “un-childlike” behaviour of heading families, challenge the system. He says that this is especially characteristic of people on the “periphery” who recognise the power of a particular cultural system but that, being unable or unwilling to identify with this dominant mode of thinking and stereotypical norms, they resist it. As a result of people on the “periphery” such as the young people heading homes in this study the meanings of terms such as “child” and “adult” have shifted over time and will continue to do so.

In the absence of an agentic „self’, or a sense of identity and a capacity to choose (Wrong cited in Billington, Hockney & Strawbridge, 1998), how would we explain the resilience of children that make something of their lives despite structural

constraints? This argument, regarding children's resilience and active role in creating their own spaces, does not however refute the great need of many children in South Africa for access to better resources and opportunities as a result of their positions of vulnerability and their disadvantaged circumstances. Consideration should especially be given to structural constraints affecting the lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These structural constraints, for example poverty (Aitken, 1994 in Valentine, 1997) and lack of access to resources, are detrimental to these children in terms of limiting their education and potential for the future.

2.8 The social construction of family

In the same way that childhood is constructed, the family too is invented. We therefore have to consider the family in light of the context (interpersonal, cultural, historical and political) that produces it. Families are often treated in discussions as universal, common and unchanging in their structure without consideration of cultural or historical factors. This idea is closely associated with the notion that children have always existed but that childhood as a phase of life is quite recent, and that the experience of childhood is not distinct from the shifts and changes in society (Hengst, 2001). Tanfer and Mott (1997) also emphasise the importance of context, and in their paper show changes in family structures throughout history as being influenced by external factors.

The family is often defined, popularly and in the world, in terms of care giving roles for dependent children. Developmental psychology is interested in the family only in so far as it is the context for child rearing. According to the structural functionalism approach, "the nuclear family is best suited to the functions of childbearing and rearing, in which men are responsible for providing financial support for the family (the good provider role) and women are responsible for the socialisation and emotional stability of the children" (Malinowski, 1913; Murdock, 1949; Parsons, 1958; Bernard, 1983 in Tanfer & Mott, 1997, p. 7). This is a convincing reason for early studies of the family tending to focus almost exclusively on the experiences of women.

In considering family structure a number of assumptions come to the fore, although it should be highlighted that each of these are generalisations and, as Burman (1994) points out, there are exceptions in each case. For example, one may assume that one of the criteria for family structure is co-residence, but what about groups of people that live together that would not consider themselves a family, for example, prisoners? And families where one parent works away from home? In addition, the assumption that emphasises the family as a site of co-operation ignores other sources of support, interrelationships between families and forms of state support, and suggests that it functions autonomously. It is important to note that in addition to individual exceptions to standard family structures, there are different cultural contexts in which family norms are governed by quite different assumptions. The emphasis placed on the extended family as a source of support in traditional African families is an example of this.

Burman comments: “The model of the nuclear family, consisting of heterosexual couples with their genetic, „naturally’ conceived children, with the man bringing home the wage and the woman keeping the home, is increasingly recognised to be a fiction” (Burman, 1994, p. 68). Support for her claim regarding the nuclear family becoming increasingly recognised as a „fiction’ is found in a number of statistical examples available to us. For example, a third of children in Britain are born to single mothers and over a third of marriages end in divorce (Burman, 1994). According to Walker et al (2004), a fifth of children in South Africa do not live with their mothers. In the US, A decline in marriage has been juxtaposed with a rise in divorce, only partially counteracted by a rise in co-habitation. This has led to an increasing proportion of children born into non-marital co-habitation or outside of a union altogether. Hood-Williams (2001) also refers to the recent changes in family systems listing increases in divorce, declining numbers of first marriages, increases in co-habitation, growth in numbers of single parents, declines in birth rates and general increase in variety and diversity of family forms.

History suggests that the nuclear family, consisting of “man and woman and children, with the man as breadwinner working outside the home and the woman responsible for housework and childcare” (Burman, 1994, p. 67), is a family form that emerged in the nineteenth century. According to Rotundo (1985 in Tanfer & Mott, 1997), prior to the nineteenth century and the transition to an industrial mode of production, the

influence and involvement of fathers in the lives of their children was generally more significant than that of mothers. The supervision of children's development was largely the responsibility of fathers, and mothers were expected to submit to their husbands on matters of childrearing (Tanfer & Mott, 1997). In the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the shift to an industrial mode of production, fathers taking on economic roles outside of the home resulted in the domestic influence of women being extended (Tanfer & Mott, 1997). Evidence of this shift exists in changing custody practices. Until the middle of the nineteenth century custody of children was more typically awarded to fathers, however, by the end of the century, mothers were increasingly awarded custody of children when marriages did not work out (Tanfer & Mott, 1997).

These well-documented social shifts have gradually altered the role of men and women in relation to each other and in relation to their children, and it seems that the conventional roles of the nuclear family are being increasingly challenged. English socialist feminists suggest that although traditional images of the nuclear family may continue to be powerful ideologically they are becoming less and less representative of reality (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982 in Hood-Williams, 2001; Burman, 1994, 2008).

In contemporary research the shift from the familial norm of biological parents and their „natural' children is reflected in an increased focus on „social' parenting, and biology is emphasised less in the definition of family (Tanfer & Mott, 1997). It is increasingly recognised that it is important for children to have a good relationship with an adult figure to mediate life's stresses and transitions but that there is no evidence that this significant adult has to be a biological parent. Saying this, despite evidence of changing families and the acknowledgement of this within developmental psychology, the majority of research still conforms to the dominant familial assumptions of the nuclear family consisting of a male breadwinner and a female child-carer, and their children (Burman, 1994). Burman maintains, however, that **what** we are beginning to see many more family structures due to changes in our society, and that what constitutes a family is culturally informed, as is her argument in respect of childhood.

In the 1970's a number of new trends acted together to bring about a further shift in family structure (Tanfer & Mott, 1997). Economists say it was an increase in employment opportunities for women that drew women into the work force. Some sociologists, however, say that better educational levels of women resulted in them becoming less satisfied with domestic responsibilities and childcare. Tanfer and Mott (1997) argue that regardless of the cause, it is clear that changes to the family structure occurred with the combined effect of social structural changes and shifts in gender roles. According to Tanfer and Mott (1997), as social, economic and political conditions shift the dynamics of family formation and parenthood also change.

2.9 Shifting dynamics of African family structures in South Africa

African families in South Africa have been dramatically impacted upon by colonisation, Apartheid, economic and land dispossession, unemployment, poverty, disability, migrant labour and urbanisation (Lesejane, 2006). Hunter (2006) highlights that the literature on families in South Africa is dominated by crises at varying points. According to Ramphela and Richter (2006) the disruption of families by colonisation and apartheid left its mark on children and the economic injustices of the apartheid era continue to make their presence felt in African communities. A further breakdown of family ties and support systems occurred during the violence that preceded political emancipation (Mkhize, 2006).

Before these changes, South African fathers were viewed as custodians of moral authority within their families. It was expected that fathers consult with family members and council (consisting of a collective of relatives that provided the immediate social and economic support base for families), in respect of important decisions. Meetings served as a platform for fathers to listen to others and obtain guidance in the establishment of values (Lesejane, 2006). For fathers to maintain their moral authority they needed to be available to spend time with their children and maintain family customs and laws (Lesejane, 2006). Fathers were also considered to be leaders who had the final responsibility in the affairs of the family. This responsibility included providing for, guiding, organising and overseeing the management of their children's lives. Important decisions, for example, whom their children married, were their responsibility. Being responsible also meant that fathers

had to be providers, and ensure that there was food on the table. Fathers would spend time counseling their sons before they were married. The preparation for fatherhood not only involved counseling, but initiation as well. The responsibility of taking care of children did not only lie with biological fathers, but also with the men in the community and relatives in cases where biological fathers were not present. Even the naming of children was viewed as an important fatherhood responsibility (Lesejane, 2006).

In the mid 1970's unemployment began to rise increasingly to its current rate of over 40% on a national level (Hunter, 2006). In South Africa unemployment and poverty are most prominent among the African population. Hunter (2006) argues that a young, unemployed man is unlikely to be able to fulfill the 'provider' role and support his child but asserts that abandonment needs to be viewed in the context of unemployment and poverty, not as an inherently male and particularly African phenomenon. The high rate of unemployment means that many African males are unable to assume the social responsibilities traditionally associated with fatherhood. They are disempowered and struggle to attain respect in the community as men, for example, when they fail to raise ilobolo (Mkhize, 2006). Meanings around fatherhood changed with the emergence of migrant labour (resulting from colonisation, apartheid and poverty) that took men away from their homes and children for long periods of time (Hunter, 2006). According to Hunter (2006) the emergence of the migrant labour system resulted in decreased emotional involvement of fathers with their families. He argues that when men could only return home for Christmas, making it impossible for fathers to be available and present in the lives of their children, the social role of fatherhood became increasingly limited to the 'provider' role. Through these changes, only men with economic means came to be regarded as good fathers (Lesejane, 2006).

Democratic change in South Africa has also brought with it subsequent challenges to the notion of fatherhood (Lesejane, 2006). Focus on the rights of women and their increasing economic independence presents a further challenge to men in terms of how they redefine themselves and their roles as men and fathers (Mkhize, 2006). In other words, the father as the symbol and custodian of ultimate power and responsibility in the family and community has shifted (Lesejane, 2006).

HIV/AIDS has also had devastating effects on families in Southern Africa. Child headed households are a rapidly emerging phenomenon in Africa as a direct result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The disease has claimed the lives of many mothers and fathers and children are left to fend for themselves in the context of extended family support networks having been eroded by factors such as poverty, urbanisation and overstretched resources. These children and families challenge the Western concept of the nuclear, cross-generational family and the associated thinking about how a family should operate.

Historically, children and families were largely neglected in response to the AIDS crisis. Although this has begun to shift, in many cases support for affected children is still left to extended families and communities (Richter et al, 2005). This is seen in examples such as the non-profit organisation, NOAH, emphasising in their campaigns that there are relatively few child-headed households in South Africa and attributing this to the explanation that South African families are managing to “absorb the orphan problem” and take care of those in their community and arguing that they need support to continue doing this. If this is the case, it should not be used as an excuse for government and society to abdicate responsibility. Richter et al (2005) argue that, although families and community networks are the most appropriate groups to help children, they cannot cope with protecting and caring for the large numbers of children in need without assistance.

2.10 Child and adolescent headed households

There has been a great deal of attention given to the phenomenon of child-headed households in the media over the past years. The response to the phenomenon of child-headed homes within civil society in recent years has been significant with numerous NGO's (e.g. NOAH – Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity; Zulufadder) gearing towards supporting these families. Government has also responded to the recognition of the phenomenon of child-headed homes in new legislature (Sloth-Nielson, 2004). Despite all of this, little is understood about how these families survive, their existing support networks and how they interact with the world around them. In the literature there is much ambiguity concerning the definition of child-headed households as in some cases parents or other relatives have moved

away but they are still involved in the children's lives to some extent. Desmond et al (2003) point out that there could be a fundamental difference between households where an adult head is temporarily absent due to labour and those where they are permanently absent or dead. They explain that in the first situation, the family may still receive financial and emotional support, supervision and protection (albeit occasional) from the absent head and interaction with the surrounding community and other family members is likely to be influenced by the fact that there is an adult somewhere in the background. Foster et al (1997) noted in their Zimbabwean study that many child-headed households maintained a link with the extended family and received support through this link. The permanent absence of an adult head does not therefore necessarily exclude the possibility of adult supervision and support. Desmond et al (2003) highlight the need for more information about family and community support of child-headed households. They argue that our understanding of what a child-headed household is, is superficial, citing two main problems with the term. First, there is no distinction made between child-headed and adolescent-headed households (Foster et al, 1997 as cited in Desmond et al, 2003). Some studies (e.g. Foster et al, 1997) differentiate between child-headed (child head under 18) and adolescent-headed households (child head is 18 to 24 but not the biological parent of any of the children in the household). Foster et al (1997) claim that the majority of households termed "child-headed" are in fact headed by teenagers. They therefore suggest that such households should be defined as a sub-set of child-headed households and referred to under the separate term of "adolescent-headed" households.

Although adolescents up to the age of 18 are themselves children in terms of the Constitution (Mahery & Proudlock, 2008; Desmond et al, 2003) Desmond et al (2003) assert that it would be more appropriate for interventions or responses to separate the terms, as young children require full time care and supervision. Adolescent heads of households, on the other hand, may require less intense support or support of a different kind.

Second, Desmond et al (2003) argue that there should be a distinction made between child or adolescent-headed households and adultless households. They contend that not all child and adolescent-headed households are adultless. They support their claim

by quoting the data available in South Africa that appears to show that there are more households headed by minors than there are households containing no adults.

According to their conclusion this means that young people under 18 years of age in child-headed households may be caring for themselves in addition to dependent adults and / or other children. They criticise the assumption that children head households because no adult is present and assert that an area requiring more attention is where children find themselves as the household head despite the presence of an adult who may be incapacitated through illness or dependent for other reasons. In cases such as these, the child or adolescent may be forced to take on all the responsibilities of a household head but there may be an adult that is still the recognised head of the family in the eyes of the surrounding community as the primary decision-maker and moral authority in the home, and in society more generally in terms of their legal standing as an adult.

The risk that may be identified here is that being the head of the family often involves the burden of the responsibility without the authority or the resources to deal with it. Research in the area of children becoming adults „before their time’ in terms of expectations on them but not in terms of their status or access to resources, is therefore extremely important.

Population based surveys in many African countries identify very small numbers of child-headed households (Richter et al, 2005), however, many policies, programmes and advocacy efforts continue to focus on these supposedly relatively rare situations. What is the reason for this? Desmond et al (2003) suggest that it is possibly the appeal of the tragic and emotive story of children heading households after the loss of caregivers and the lost childhoods of teenagers becoming adults before their time. As adults from a privileged world the idea of children deprived of their childhoods and left to fend for themselves is particularly abhorrent to us. This sentiment is perpetuated by the media publishing articles such as an article in a South African newspaper entitled “The Man of the House”; a story about an orphaned boy of thirteen from a village near Pietersburg who, at Christmas time, „unlike other children his age...cannot look forward to getting gifts or new clothes, or eating a three-course meal’ but instead spends his day cooking and caring for himself and his little sister and collecting water for other villagers from the well an hour and a half away in

return for a few meagre cents (Mail and Guardian, 2001, December 20 – 2002, January 10, p. 30).

Although the lives of these children are constrained by a shortage of resources and extreme vulnerability, and they may be heavily burdened by their responsibilities, Desmond et al (2003) point out that over-sentimentalising the situation can do more harm than good. They warn that singling out specific groups may lead to increased stigmatisation. Discrimination and social exclusion is often associated with AIDS. Families affected by AIDS are spoken about negatively and rejected by their communities in many instances (Segu & Wolde-Yohannes, 2000). The attitudes of community adults to these children have a significant impact on their lives because acceptance and community integration affects their ability to meet their daily needs. However, children living in child-headed families are often ostracised due to the stigma associated with the disease and further because it is „unnatural’ for children to live alone. Francis-Chizororo (2007) claimed in her study that the responses of community members were mixed with some viewing children living without adult supervision with suspicion, complaining that they were wild and unruly while others were sympathetic and supportive. Either way, she found that most of the time, communities did not accord children running households with the same status as adults even though some had reached legal age of majority (i.e. 18 years) at the time of the study. She attributes this to the fact that in Shona communities many children live in their parents’ homes and are still subject to their authority at eighteen. The attitudes of community adults to these children have a significant impact on their lives because acceptance and community integration affects their ability to meet their daily needs.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The study follows a narrative approach that falls within the broad paradigm of qualitative research. From the perspective of the narrative approach to research, human lives are viewed as enacted stories. A personal narrative is a story that every one of us constructs to bring together different parts of ourselves to form a meaningful, authentic and coherent identity (Crossley, 2000a). McAdams (cited in Crossley, 2000a) asserts that we create ourselves through narrative. Telling our stories helps us to define who we are, enhancing self-understanding and making sense of our existence. Fay (1996) proposes that, although at times life appears to be a mixture of unrelated events, there are moments in which human beings have a sense of being part of a drama, containing an underlying plot, which gives meaning to our or others' experiences, relations and activities. According to Squire (2008), narratives are the "means of human sense making" (2008, p. 43). She cites Ricoeur's adaptation of Socrates by which he asserts that "the 'examination' of a life, without which life is not worth living, consists in the recounting of it" (1991 cited in Squire, 2008, p. 43). Narrative approaches are concerned with personal experiences connected to the broader contexts of social relationships. This is a particularly relevant point for this study, as children taking on adult roles and behaving as adults, brings into question society's ideas about what it means to be a child and what it means to be an adult, in relational terms. Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou (2008) proclaim that one of the allures of using narrative methods in research is that it enables us to see different, sometimes contradictory, layers of meaning, bring them into dialogue with each other and enabling us to gain more insight into individual and social change.

The chosen narrative method for this study is an adaptation of Michelle Crossley's approach. Crossley (2000b) rejects social constructionist approaches that ignore the presence of an individual agent and consider the 'self' only in discursive terms. Parker (2005), for example, argues that people are fashioned from the outside and that resources and contexts shape people and make choices for them rather than the other way around. According to Parker (2005), narrative is the performance of the self as a

story of identity. He argues that pre-existing voices or discourses inform narratives and he is interested in identifying these rather than the themes emerging from a story-teller's own experiences. According to Parker's (2005) perspective, a story-teller may therefore use the pre-existing, culturally available script of, for example, a victim/survivor story to relate their story of difficult life circumstances thereby producing a certain version of themselves for a particular audience. For example, the fact that we, as a society, value survivors and expect people to be brave, may influence the way people tell stories.

Crossley's (2000b) perspective concurs with this to some extent in that she acknowledges that self and identity are grounded in cultural forms of sense making. She emphasises that it is especially important to look at the role played by social and cultural influences in respect of the narratives available to individuals. However, her approach, in contrast to Parker's, attempts to examine the cultural structuration of individual experience by suggesting that people, as agentic „selves', choose and buy into particular arguments or positions from the social resources that are available to them and use these to present themselves in a particular way and to explain or justify aspects of their individual or social „realities' or lived experiences. Therefore, according to the theory underlying this approach, people play an active role in structuring their own experiences within the confines of the particular discourses or social resources to which they have access. People are not simply victims of external forces but rather they deal with difficult life situations and process them in their own way by intentionally authoring (Fay, 1996) and creating their own stories, restructuring their lives and making sense of them. This approach is therefore consistent with the idea that people respond to what society imposes on them in different ways, and that this would not be possible without some form of agentic 'self' or subject. In the absence of an agentic „self' we cannot explain resistance to social structures. It is important to understand how people can act for themselves, how they play a part in creating their own stories within the socially constructed confines of their existence. Although Parker's approach has been used as a point of comparison in order to bring to light the distinctive aspects of Crossley's position, this does not imply a complete rejection of Parker's views. Crossley (2000b) that although Parker focuses on discursive structuring, he does ask what is going on „inside' people when they use discourse.

Crossley's approach which emphasises the lived, experiential realities of everyday lives (Crossley, 2000b) is congruent with this line of thinking. Her model, with its emphasis on individual experience and agency, is positioned towards the phenomenological end of the narrative research spectrum. It is situated within what Squire (2008) calls the "experiential model" within narrative research. This model assumes "individual, internal representations of phenomena – events, thoughts and feelings – to which narrative gives external *expression*" (Squire et al, 2008 , p. 5). According to Squire (2008) experience-centred narratives are defined by theme more than structure. They may go beyond the past tense and include present and future stories about others as well as the self. This approach proposes that experience emerges from the 'subject' of those experiences; the subject having some unity and agency across different narrative identities and in different contexts. This position may be contrasted with the idea of a fragmented and socially determined subject more popular in postmodern thinking (Squire, 2008). An experience-centred narrative may be characterised by a life turning point (Denzin 1989 cited in Squire, 2008) for example, experiencing a trauma and its consequences or a contravention to normality and an attempt to restore it (Bruner 1990 cited in Squire, 2008). In keeping with this emphasis on transformation, much of Crossley's work explores trauma in particular, which she suggests disrupts people's life narratives thereby forcing them to construct new stories to make sense of these events. According to Crossley (2000b), traumatic events therefore disrupt people's orderly sense of existence and their routines thereby casting doubt over their previously taken for granted assumptions about time, identity, meaning and life. This, in turn, highlights the way that a lived sense of unity, coherence and meaning usually prevails (Crossley, 2000b). In other words, it highlights the idea that something in the person remains consistent through changing contexts. Trauma shatters an individual's narrative so that it no longer makes sense. However, what has emerged from Crossley's work, is that this shattering is not an ending, but a turning point and the beginning of new story. When the order is disrupted through trauma, narratives are used to rebuild an individual's shattered sense of identity and meaning as well as their assumptions about time, meaning and life. In this way individuals are forced to rethink their aims and their future direction, and to start a new story. People therefore reinvent their story in an attempt to restore a sense of order (Crossley, 2000b).

A valid critique of Crossley's framework is whether or not it is realistic to assume, as she does, with regards to trauma, that people experience one pivotal life event or that narrative is interrupted by one traumatic incident. Crossley's work generally involves sex abuse survivors and HIV/AIDs diagnoses and she sees the abuse or the moment of diagnosis, respectively, as being the trauma that shatters the person's life narrative thereby making it necessary for the individual to reconstruct their narrative in order to restore some semblance of order and meaning in their life. Her method, which was developed in the context of the first world, where multiple traumas are relatively rare, may be more difficult to apply in the face of chaotic, changing lives and continuous trauma. Where there are multiple traumas it is generally not possible to tease out just one (Wilbraham, personal communication, July 31, 2009). This is seen in some of the current work on children in South Africa living with multiple traumas such as poverty, AIDS, bereavement, violence and abuse. Many people lead extremely difficult lives characterised by long term hardship and suffering which makes it difficult to identify one traumatic, life shattering event. Multiple traumas also fragment narratives or stories and there is no time to rebuild them. Those surviving day-to-day within the confines of extremely difficult life circumstances may not have the 'luxury' to self-reflect or the sense of agency to enable them to recreate new life narratives.

Experience-focused research has also been criticised for focusing too much on the subjective experience of the author 'behind' the material (Squire, 2008) giving very little attention to both the local and wider contexts. Reissman (2008), for example, in her examinations of illness narratives, pays attention to multiple factors; critiques experience-based, agentic models and suggests a more open "thematic analysis" approach to narrative data in this type of setting to allow consideration of the role of context in shaping experiences and norms (Wilbraham, personal communication, July 31, 2009). Reissman (2008) argues that the thematic narrative approach mostly ignores the researcher's role in co-constructing the story and rather focuses on a narrative that appears to emerge 'full blown' from the narrator (p. 58). In the context of my study this is an important consideration given that expectations of how I could help the young people I interviewed may have influenced the position taken in their responses. One of the respondents, Thandiwe Hlanganani, for example, said she thought that some of the young people that decided not to be a part of the research

probably did so because they did not think they could get anything out of it. This is something to be aware of when involving people in research who are already overburdened and struggling and expecting them to give their time for free.

“It’s because maybe there are things that they trust in because the aunty said we might get help I don’t know if that’s true so they don’t have hope in this, that talking to you might help them.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L1817-1819)

Squire (2008) recommends that one way around the problem of the researcher remaining obscure in experience-focused research is to bring into consideration the social and cultural character of personal narratives. She asserts that personal and cultural narratives are interconnected. She also advocates that authors and audiences of stories are political as well as cultural actors and that collectively over time personal stories can lead to political change. She explains that it is common for personal stories to function as bids for power from the powerless. Reissman (2008) points to examples of researchers giving attention to wider contexts by making connections between what emerges in personal narratives and larger social structures, for example power relations and hidden inequalities.

A further criticism of experience-centred research is that it may reject fragmented or contradictory narratives for their incoherent representations of experience and Squire (2008) argues that we, as researchers, cannot prescribe what events should be mentioned in life stories and how they should be talked about.

Situating experience-centred research in a broader socio-political and cultural context can counteract some of these problems according to Squire (2008). However, focusing on cultural stories can on the other hand also result in researchers losing sight of the individual stories. Squire (2008) concludes her chapter by pointing out that narrative approaches, whether more focused on individual stories, cultural patterns of representation or stories produced interpersonally in the research setting, often function to describe or theorise about under or unrepresented lives and that maybe this shared aim transcends the differences in theory and method used. For the above reasons, given the population and context for my study, although using Crossley’s

approach as a theoretical framework, I have extended her approach by using thematic analysis in place of the McAdams method of analysis recommended in her work. This will be looked at in more detail below in the discussion under the method of analysis.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

A household for the purposes of this study is a house or similar private domestic dwelling space occupied by the family. The child who is the head of the household is the child who is primarily responsible for the day to day running of the household, supervision and decision-making and managing resources even if the children do receive assistance from extended family in terms of support, material or otherwise. In the literature there is much confusion concerning the definition of child-headed households as in some cases parents or other relatives have moved away but they are still involved in the children's lives to some extent. The role of „significant' adults in the lives of these children is one of the issues that will be explored in the study.

The target population for this study was child or adolescent heads of households, and their siblings that live with them. Children were required to be between 14 and 18 years of age to participate in the study. Although minors according to the law are defined as children under the age of 18 years (Mahery & Proudlock, 2008), children that had already turned 18 were not excluded from the study if they were still in school. It is the norm in the South African schooling system for young people whose birthdays fall after the 30th June to turn 18 in their final year at school. Aside from this norm, it is common for children from underprivileged communities to fall behind in their education and to progress through the schooling system much more slowly. This may be as a result of a lower quality of education offered in underprivileged areas but it may also be as a result of children missing school due to their family circumstances and the „work' they are required to do outside of school. This is particularly apparent in child-headed families where children have other important responsibilities to juggle and often miss entire years of school thereby delaying the completion of their schooling into their twenties. Children in these circumstances may also drop out of school early, although, according to South African Law, the minimum school leaving age is fifteen or the end of Grade 9, whichever comes first (Mahery & Proudlock, 2008). Five out of the six heads of homes I interviewed were 18 and over, the eldest

participants being two 20 year olds; one in her final year of school, Grade 12, and the other in Grade 10 meaning that should she persevere and complete her schooling she will be at least 22 when she finishes school. Both of these participants, Nosipho Dlamini and Mbali Luthuli, have had a child of their own which, aside from carrying the additional responsibilities of running a home, one would expect to result in interruptions to their schooling. Sipho Mabuza and Bongani Hlanganani, two of the male heads of households interviewed. Sipho is 19 in Grade 10 and Bongani is 18 in Grade 10 therefore both young men will be at least 20 when they finish school.

The reason for not interviewing children below the age of 14 is that children below the age of 14 years are unable to give their own consent to participate in research (Collings, personal communication, May, 2008). There are, in fact, no laws in the South African regulations that refer to the rights of research participants, and the National Health Act (Section 71) is the first attempt by the legislature to use the Law to protect research participants, including children. However, one of its limitations according to Strode, Grant, Slack & Mushariwa (2005) is that it does not set an independent age for consent to participate in research. In their article (2005) they also highlight the logistical and practical problems of gaining consent where parents or legal guardians are deceased or absent and cite the example of child-headed households. These flaws in local legislation are an important point as there is a dearth of qualitative research targeting children in child-headed homes particularly in terms of hearing from the children themselves. The lack of clarity regarding independent age of consent and ethical guidelines concerning this population group present a barrier and deterrent to much needed research being undertaken in this area. For this study, due to the fact that children were selected on the basis that parents or guardians were absent, obtaining adult consent for the participation of children under 14 was not possible.

The analytical aim of the project was not to be able to make generalisations to the population but rather to interpret the meaning and function of stories underlying what was said in the interviews. This is a typical feature of narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008). The sampling technique therefore employed was that of purposive sampling since the participants were required to meet the specific criteria of either being a child running a household or one of the siblings living with one of the child heads of

households participating in the study. Access to the communities was arranged through NGOs that offer various forms of material support to child-headed households in each of the respective communities. Suitable participants that were willing to participate in the study were identified by community workers and NGO representatives. This means that the community workers and NGO representatives were the ones that identified the families as child-headed (based on the criteria explained to them beforehand) and identified the child that was head of the family in each case. In Cato Manor a meeting was held to provide information to potential participants about the study and some of these then agreed to partake. The community workers also facilitated the arrangements for meeting with the participants for subsequent interviews.

The participants were drawn from two disadvantaged communities in KwaZulu-Natal. There were six families or households that participated in the study, four from Cato Manor (an urban setting) and two from Umlalazi, a rural village near Eshowe. The youngest child interviewed was fourteen and the oldest was twenty, although still attending school, as per my selection criteria. The oldest head of a family was twenty and the youngest head of family was seventeen. Both household heads from the rural village were male and two of the household heads from the urban setting were male while the other two were female. Table 1 below presents the participants of the study.

Table 1: Participants

Family	Area	Interviewee	Gender	Age	Grade	No. of interviews
1. Dlamini ¹	Peri-urban / Cato Manor	*Nosipho	Female	20	10	2
		Zama	Female	19	11	2
		Zinhle	Female	16	8	2
2. Luthuli	Peri-urban / Cato Manor	*Mbali	Female	20	12	2
3. Hlanganani	Peri-urban / Cato Manor	*Bongani	Male	18	10	2
		Thandiwe	Female	15		2
4. Nkosi	Peri-urban / Cato Manor	Bheka	Male	14	6	2
5. Mabuza	Rural / Umlalazi	*Sipho	Male	19	10	2

¹ All names and surnames have been changed.

	near Eshowe					
		Thulisile	Female	18	8	1
6. Ndebele	Rural / Umlalazi near Eshowe	*Mandla	Male	17	10	2
		Mndeni	Male	14		2

*Head of household

In the first Cato Manor based family there were three eligible participants in one household (i.e. based on age), two in the next, and one in each of the other two. Each participant was interviewed twice (a total of 14 interviews). In the two Eshowe families there were two participants interviewed from each of the two families. In the first family both participants were interviewed twice on separate occasions and in the other family one participant was interviewed twice and the other once as she was unreachable after the first interview. Therefore a total of seven interviews were conducted in Umlalazi near Eshowe and twenty one interviews overall across both locations.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A participant information sheet was given to each participant prior to each first interview together with a consent form (see Appendix 1). The information sheet was available in English and in isiZulu. It explained the nature of the research study and emphasised that participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time from the study. The researchers' contact details, and credentials were recorded on the information sheet, and this gave all of the participants the opportunity to contact the researchers if they wished to do so.

Written consent pertaining to each individual's participation in the study itself was obtained from each participant prior to the interview sessions, and permission for the tape recording of interviews was obtained from each participant. At each interview a pseudonym was chosen by the participant in order to ensure that his or her identity in the study was anonymous and that his or her participation in the study was confidential. Where participants did not choose a pseudonym, these were chosen by the researcher.

One of the challenges in finding families to agree to participate in the study was the stigma attached to being from a child-headed home and another was finding time for interviews in their schedules already over-burdened with school work, household chores and child care. I did not want to offer any formal form of remuneration for participating in the interviews as, being a stigmatised group and vulnerable to many forms of exploitation, I did not want to co-erce them into participating in the study. I did however provide refreshments for the interview which all of the children took away with them.

Given that the research topic may have been experienced as potentially traumatic and stressful for the study's participants, provision was made for free, professional counseling at the School of Psychology's clinic. The contact details for the Clinic Director were included in each participant's information sheet. With the aim of protecting research participants, constraints were placed on the content of the interviews by not discussing the death of parent(s) in any detail unless raised by the participant.

Interviews were recorded but recordings were kept in the possession of the researcher where no-one could access them. Names were immediately changed on the transcripts so as to protect the anonymity of the participants.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 Interview structures

The participants participated in semi-structured narrative face to face interviews focused around obtaining socio-demographic profiles of the families participating in the study and hearing their life stories. Interviews were set up by each of the community contacts at a time convenient to each participant and refreshments were provided. The interviews took place in a meeting room of the public library in Cato Manor (except for one, the first which took place in the participant's home and was far too disruptive) and in one of the NGO cabins in the village near Eshowe. Privacy

of each interaction was ensured and interruptions were kept to a minimum. A first language isiZulu speaker was used as an interpreter. Although some of the young people interviewed were proficient in the English language, particularly the girls from the Dlamini family who attended an English medium school and some of the other young people from the urban setting of Cato Manor, it was felt that in speaking about deep personal issues, their talk would flow more naturally in their home language and the richness of expression of self and experience would be more likely to come through. However, some of the interviewees did respond to some questions in English but these were generally surface level questions around their ages and grades at school. When deeper questions were asked they automatically lapsed into using their mother tongue isiZulu again.

The first interview was designed to elicit socio-demographic information and to loosely follow the McAdams (1993) personal narrative interview protocol recommended by Crossley (cited in Crossley, 2000a) (see Appendix 2). The interviews were based on open-ended questions that were designed to elicit the participants' narratives in their own words. Squire (2008) states that most experience-centred narrative interviewing is semi-structured. Within this, the degree of researcher involvement may vary depending on whether the interviewer's perspective. Some see the story as existing within the person internally and therefore merely has to ask the participant to „tell their story' with little or no intervention on their part. Elsewhere on the “continuum”, it is not uncommon in narrative interviewing to collect and study stories about particular experiences or context which may be elicited through questioning such as asking for an example or for the participant to give more details about something (Squire, 2008).

The semi-structured interview was chosen as a method of interviewing because it is less directive than a structured interview format which allowed for the children to express themselves more fully in their own ways and share their own perceptions and experiences. However it also allowed for inclusion of specific questions and issues that needed to be addressed while simultaneously allowing for a degree of flexibility in terms of „the order' in which aspects of phenomena were explored (Kvale, 1996). In a semi-structured interview the questions serve merely as a guide, allowing the

interviewee to speak more widely and the interviewer to enter the psychological and social world of the interviewee as much as possible.

Socio-demographic questions included questions such as who the members of the household were, their ages, their gender, the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the child-headed household, how long it had been in existence, whether there are any surviving members of the original family unit that no longer live in the household or only temporarily live in the household, total number of surviving siblings, whether living in the household or not, and their birth order and gender, support network structures. It was anticipated that this information would help to shed light on important issues for the study such as whether gender appears to play a role in whether children remain in child-headed homes. Semi-structured interviews were also held with some of the younger siblings of the child heads of households that were still living at home. After that follow up interviews were conducted with participants in order to further explore themes around the research questions (see Appendix 3). Therefore, although maintaining a semi-structured broadly narrative interview format the second interview was designed to prompt talk around pre-formulated thematic issues that my theoretical framework highlighted as being important in a similar style to Hollway and Jefferson (2000 cited in Squire, 2008).

The categories in the McAdams protocol were useful as a guide for asking respondents open, exploratory questions about their lives and the different aspects that were of particular relevance to the study. For example, as well as there being a prompt to give an outline of their life stories there is was a category of questions that covers significant people and the role that they play in their lives. This directly relates to my exploration of family and support structures surrounding these young people's households. My original plan was to ask very broad, open questions such as, "please tell me about your life, thinking as far back as you remember and talk about the things that stand out in your memory", and for the respondents to do most of the talking. However I soon discovered that much more prompting and clarifying was required. More structured questions around the categories concerning significant people, future plans, hopes and dreams and stresses and obstacles, had the effect of making the interview flow more easily and produced far richer results.

An example of the difficulties in initially getting respondents to „tell their stories’ is demonstrated in the following interactions from some of my earlier interviews:

Interviewer: *“I am also interested in hearing an outline of your life story. Do you know what I mean by that?”*

Interpreter: *“Talk about who you are, how you are like in your life.”*

Mbali: *“I do not know what to say”*

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L304-306; L316)

Interviewer: *“If you were asked to tell your life story, about what happened in your life a long time ago that you can never forget, things that are still in your mind that you can tell us?”*

Mndeni: *“There is nothing.”*

Interviewer: *“Maybe things you can remember that happened and you have seen them as more important than other things in your life?”*

Mndeni: *“No”*

Interviewer: *“What are important things that happened in your life that made a difference?”*

Mndeni: *“There is nothing”*

(Ndebele, Mndeni 1, L242-244; L245; L247-248; L249; L252-253; L254)

Interviewer: *“Can you tell us about your life ever since you were young growing up, anything you want to tell us.”*

Bongani: *“I don’t know.”*

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L468-469; L472)

In the beginning, this scenario led to both my interpreter and I, out of desperation, prompting and directing talk in problematic ways as in the example below from the first interview that we conducted together. We were both tempted to fill the silences with our own talk, clarifying and reclarifying meanings of questions. At one point in this first interview my interpreter even asked if she could give an example from her own life in order to demonstrate to the interviewee what kinds of things she could say about hers.

Interpreter: “...not about serious issues like if I can say I don't know you besides telling me of your name what else would you say about yourself?”

Mbali: [Silence]

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L310-312)

Interviewer: “If you look back on your life, like if I was going to tell you about my life I might tell you about where I was born, what I can remember from when I was very young, um, I would probably tell you about my family...important things like your first day at school, important things you remember. Just if you look back over your life, um, and how you got to this point where you are now.”

Mbali: [Silence]

Interpreter: “Do you think it's going to help if I can just tell her some of my story, do you think that can help?”

Interviewer: “I don't think so”

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L318-326)

Therefore, using Crossley's approach, although a suitable theoretical framework for my study, I initially encountered technical challenges in conducting the interviews. This may be at least partly explainable by the nature of who my research population was. It was clearly unusual for these young people, whose lives are characterised by daily hardship and suffering, and a preoccupation with day-to-day survival, to talk about their lives in the reflective style that the McAdams protocol is designed to elicit. People with a Western notion or concept of self are likely to be familiar with concepts such as „life theme', which is one of the categories in the McAdams protocol, however, this concept is likely to be foreign to young people from backgrounds such as those of the young people I interviewed.

Of course their reluctance to talk could also be explained by a self-consciousness that is characteristic of adolescents. This was most likely compounded by the fact that, as a white, English-speaking adult from the University, I was an outsider on more than one count. Their wariness may have also been exacerbated by experiences of being ostracised by their communities due to the stigma associated with children from child-headed families and by the hostility that many of them had experienced from adults.

Mbali Luthuli's apprehension, for example, is evident when, at the commencement of the interview, she says:

"I won't be able to speak."

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L3)

This is where my interpreter played a very important role in mediating my 'otherness' and in building a rapport with the young interviewees, a very important component in fulfilling the goal of understanding in this type of interview (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Being a young, mother-tongue isiZulu speaker herself, she was particularly skilful in mirroring the style of talk and young people's jargon used by the participants when she spoke to them. This facilitated them feeling more relaxed and at ease in the interview situation.

3.4.2 Translations

All of the interviews were conducted in isiZulu. Initially, with the aim of keeping the interview questions as open as possible, the plan was for me to ask the questions in English, the interpreter to translate them in the interview, for the interviewee to respond and for the interpreter to summarise their answers in English so that I would have the opportunity to decide how to move forward with the next question.

What happened, however, was that, particularly in the first set of interviews as mentioned above, many of the questions needed to be explained. This resulted in back and forth clarifying and re-clarifying between my interpreter and I, since I was the researcher and she needed guidance from me about where I wanted to go with the line of questioning if the original questions were unsuccessful in eliciting meaningful responses. This meant that, although in this way I was able to maintain a handle on the course and direction of the interviews, there was much more translating happening in the actual interviews than initially envisaged. This made them bitty and disjointed at times. Despite this, what I did find useful was the way in which having an interpreter allowed me to step back slightly from the process and to reflect on the process of the interviews as they unfolded. Not being directly involved in the conversations for periods of time meant that I was able to observe things I would

otherwise have been unaware of. This distance meant that I had time to consider the impact of what the respondent had said previously and to formulate my next question. A further way in which it was useful to have an interpreter was when background noise during the interviews and participants speaking too softly interfered with the quality of the interview recordings and participant responses were inaudible on the disk during the transcription process. Having the in-interview translations in the transcriptions meant that some of the meanings of the participants' responses could be picked up in some cases where they would otherwise have been lost.

In addition to translating the language for me my interpreter also acted as a guide in terms of having insider cultural knowledge. As Baker (1992 cited in Frankish, 2009) suggests, interpreters of interviews are involved in finding cultural equivalence as well as word equivalence. A good example of this was where my interpreter translated directly the words meaning ‚small grandfather’ and then automatically went on to explain that this did not literally mean ‚small’ and ‚grandfather’ but rather the younger brother of the interviewee’s grandfather. Another example, also involving family descriptions, was the way of talking about what in English would be termed ‚aunts’ and ‚cousins’ as mothers and sisters. This cultural practice of not differentiating these relationships was readily explained by my interpreter as an extension of her direct translation of the language. This additional insight was of particular value in this study given my aim to understand and describe the family structures of these children and therefore if she had stopped at the literal translation of the words I would have missed out on some valuable and essential knowledge.

If one recognises that a researcher is not a neutral and objective entity but is, instead, involved in co-constructing the interview with the interviewee, it may be argued that relying on an interpreter opens interviews up to additional layers of meaning, biases and interpretations which can lead to misunderstandings (Freeman cited in Fontana & Frey, 2000). It should, however, be acknowledged that, although not a neutral and objective method of accessing another’s experience, translation does provide a means of hearing stories across ‚race’, class and linguistic divides (Frankish, 2009).

My second interviews also followed a semi-structured format and were formulated around my broader research questions. So, for example, in the case of my research

question concerned with how children construct their identities as heads of households and decision makers, I pre-formulated some sub-questions as follows: (Refer to Appendix 3 for full schedule).

How did it come about that you took on the responsibility of looking after your family?

What is different about how you see yourself now from how you saw yourself before?

Although these questions served merely as a guide and often the interviews did not follow their structure and format, it was useful to think about ways to address the questions in advance of the actual interviews and to discuss wording and language with my interpreter so that she was pre-prepared to ask questions in different ways if need be to elicit adequate responses. This preparation helped the interviews to flow more easily as, in the interview situation itself, while the interpreter is occupied with the task of translating, there is little time to think about how to clarify terms and how to approach more abstract questions in ways that may be more accessible and better received by the respondents.

On the whole the interviewees spoke more easily in these interviews in which the questions were centred around certain topics rather than merely offering completely open narrative questions as prompts for the young people to talk about their lives. Of course, the fact that they had already participated in one interview and had a better idea of what to expect may also have facilitated their ability and willingness to talk more freely in the second interviews.

3.5 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

3.5.1. Family diagrams

Family structure was of particular interest in this study due to the atypical family structure of child-headed families. Exploring the role of „significant’ adults in the lives of these children was one of the aims of the study and one of the key research questions framed how these children construct their sense of family. What was discovered in the first few interviews was that the few demographic questions I had

put together to elicit information about household and family structure from the participants turned into lengthy discussions, many misunderstandings and much clarifying and re-clarifying. I decided to attempt to present the families pictorially as a part of my analysis to assist in explaining the complex family descriptions. This now forms explicit analytic commentary that provides a first descriptive analysis of how child-headed households / families are structured.

After the first interviews I attempted to piece together the often disjointed and contradictory descriptions of families and significant others and present them diagrammatically. I attempted at first to use standard anthropological kinship diagrams as seen in, for example, Jones (1993), but discovered that in doing this I was attempting to fit the families into my preconceived notion of what a family is. In these families, a neighbour, teacher, or another „outsider’ such as a social worker may be a very significant adult figure in the life of the child and, although they may not appear on a conventional family diagram or tree, may be just as significant, or even more so, in the present life of a child, as a deceased parent. In the second interviews I went back to each participant with my diagram and addressed the issue of household, family and significant others once again, filling in any gaps and correcting any misunderstandings from the first interviews. Instead of creating family trees to present the results I use „family rivers’, born out of an idea in a newspaper article entitled “Families that need rivers, not trees” (Sunday Times publ. April 19, 2009) about the challenge faced by unconventional families in completing school projects commonly assigned by teachers to their students in their early school going years involving children’s family trees. In trying to impose my understanding of family structure in the context of the child-headed families that participated in my study I initially experienced the same problematic confusion that children and their caregivers from unconventional families must struggle with as they attempt this early school exercise of producing their family diagrams.

The rivers are intended to present a picture of significant others (whether family members or not) whose influences flow into their lives with varying degrees of strength. If one were to describe it metaphorically one could say that the river has tributaries that flow into the children’s lives and that sometimes these are river beds that are mostly dry. It shows that certain relationships are more important to the

children than others and that this is not dependent on biological family connections. The children within the child-headed household are presented within a ‚pool’ in the river, and the tributaries organised around the pool in the diagram lead from family members or other people that they have spoken about in their narratives into this pool. The tributaries are coded in the diagram to represent some of the detail given by the children about the relationships they share with these people and this coding is displayed in a key to the diagrams which is explained in more detail in the analysis presented in chapter 4 below.

3.5.2 Interviews

A core principle in qualitative methods is the analysis of meaning in depth and in context. Kvale (1996) notes that there are three parts to qualitative data analysis:- first the structuring of the interview material, i.e. the transcript, then clarification of the material by eliminating superfluous items, e.g. repetitions, digressions and anything regarded as non-essential, and finally the analysis ‚proper’.

3.5.2.1 Transcription and translation

First, the interpreter transcribed each of the interviews in their entirety from recordings made. The content of the interview material was prioritised in the transcription process and the finer details such as pauses, hesitations, overlaps and so on were not recorded. This was consistent with Crossley’s method not to perform a full linguistic transcription. It is common in thematic narrative analysis generally to focus on thematic meanings and purpose rather than language itself (Reissman, 2008). The interviews were conducted in isiZulu and therefore once each interview had been transcribed they were translated, as a whole, into English. Approximately one third of the total interviews were then back translated from English into isiZulu by an independent (blind) translator and the two Zulu versions (i.e. the initial isiZulu transcription done by the in-interview interpreter and the second version translated back into isiZulu from English by the blind translator) were compared by the first translator to pick up any significant differences in language. Transcription is the starting point of analysis as the original conversation is converted to a written format and therefore subject to interpretation to some degree by the transcriber. Translation

introduces an additional layer of interpretation and therefore, in an attempt to acknowledge and recognise this, differences were discussed in terms of their impact on the overall meaning. It was decided after completing this process for six of the interviews, that the differences were not significant in terms of the overall meanings. It was therefore decided that not all of the interviews would be subjected to the blind translation test due to time and budget constraints. Some of the more common language differences that emerged from this process are discussed briefly below.

The main difference that emerged, which did not change the meanings of what was said, was that the blind translator used more formal, traditional isiZulu in his back translations. For example, where the interviewees and my in-interview interpreter used words adapted from English in their talk the blind translator would use the proper isiZulu equivalents in his back translation. This type of language mixing is common in urban spaces and is particularly characteristic in young people's jargon. This is seen in that the use of words adapted from English is particularly evident in the interviews with the urban children from Cato Manor, for example, the Dlamini family who attend an English medium school. My interpreter's sensitivity to context can be seen in that she picks up and mirrors this style of talk that emerges in these interviews with the urban based interviewees and adapts to „speak their language' as it were. My blind translator was a lecturer from the isiZulu department at the University which probably accounts in part for his use of formal isiZulu, but it is also not insignificant that he was removed from the context of the interviews and had only the words on paper to work with. This would surely have contributed to his focus on the language and the construction of literal and „accurate' translations. This highlights the point made earlier that the in-interview interpreter's function extends beyond the task of translating language. Instead, she played an important role in imparting context relevant information and „translating' cultural nuances and „in group' jargon.

Examples of language mixing or adapting English words and using them in isiZulu talk are demonstrated in the following extracts. In the first one, Zama Dlamini uses the expression “oright” to mean “great” and “ukusuppoter” adapted from the English verb “to support” to mean to support or take care of her siblings. When the blind translator back translated this extract into isiZulu he uses a proper isiZulu word

“ongcono” meaning “better” in the first example, and the verb “ngisize” meaning “to help” in place of “ukusupporter” or “to support” in the second example.

“Ukuthi ngikwazi ukuqhubeka nokufunda ngiqede ngithole umsebenzi oright ngikwazi ukusupporter iingane zasekhaya nezinye ngifeze nezidingo zami ezinye engifufisayo ukuthi konke engifuna ukuthi ngibe nakho ngikuthole.”

I want to study until I’m finished so that I can get a great job to support my siblings and also satisfy all my other needs. My wish is to be able to have all that I want.

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L176-178)

In the second extract, Zinhle Dlamini uses an anglicised word for “phone” and the blind translator back translates this into „proper’ isiZulu, “ushaya ucingo” or “to phone”.

“Hayi asikhulumisani uthanda amantombazana kakhulu so nje ayikho into engiyi expecte kuyena ngoba ayikho into angisiza ngayo futhi akangifoneli nami angimfoneli aniceli lutho nje kuyena.”

No we don’t talk to each other. He is a womaniser and so I don’t expect anything from him because he doesn’t help me with anything and he doesn’t phone me and I don’t phone him. I don’t ask for anything from him.

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L528-533)

The third extract provides an example of how the in-interview interpreter is in tune with the context and adapts to this style of talking when she uses the word “decidayo” adapted from English to mean “decides”. The back translator, however, uses a strong isiZulu word; “nqumayo” for the same meaning.

Interpreter: *“Ubani o decidayo ukuthi ok Zinhle uzokwenza lokhu wena uzokwenza lokhu?”*

Who decides that ok, Zinhle, you are going to do this and you are going to do this?

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L279-280)

The idea of background knowledge and context facilitating making sense of language meanings leads on to the difference in the versions of translated text attributable to the removal of the conversation texts from their original context. The following provides such an example of literal translation that altered the intended meaning and highlighted the potential for misinterpretation. In the extract below the participant uses the word “Umfundisi” which was translated by the in-interview interpreter to mean “Minister” (of the church). However, due to the fact that “minister” is also a term used for a government official in English, when the blind translator back translated the word “minister” into isiZulu, he used the word “ungqongqoshe” meaning government official. What we did in this case was to clarify the meaning in the original English transcription was change the word “minister” to “pastor”.

“You see now the situation is worse because now the social worker has told us that the people who used to give them vouchers are not giving them anymore and there are none left and they are going to close for December. We run out of food and it’s hard to get food, sometimes we go to school on empty stomachs and come back without eating and not even the following day. We walk from school to home and we get home at about 5, then we have to wash our shirts and there is no food. We sleep again on empty stomachs and wake up in the morning again. That’s why we told the minister that we don’t have food...”

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L259-266)

As a result of the back translation exercise it was also found that differences in grammatical rules between the two languages could result in information becoming lost. For example, in isiZulu “you” singular and “you” plural are distinguished from each other but in English they are the same. This meant that in certain places where the meaning should have been “all of you”, the back translated version came back with “you” in the singular. For example, where the in-interview interpreter asked what all of the young people in the house do when they come back from school i.e. “wenzani”, the back translated version showed this as “what do you do?” in the singular.

“When you come back from school what do you do, what are things that need to be done in the house?”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L165-166)

In addition to instances where different words with the same meaning were used across the two versions of translated transcripts, for example “kwakulukhuni” and “kwakunizma”, both meaning “difficult”, in some cases there were differences in meaning. In these cases my interpreter discussed the difference and decided which word (and the English translation of it) best represented what the original speaker was trying to say and the English transcript was adapted accordingly. In Zama Dlamini’s second interview she makes a statement that was translated by my interpreter to mean: *“It means it’s kids with no parents who are responsible for themselves.”* (Dlamini, Zama 2, L17). In her original speech Zama uses the word “eseziyiphethe”, to indicate children that are responsible for themselves or in charge. When the blind translator translated this English sentence back into isiZulu he used “ezinzigade” which may be better explained as children who look after themselves. Although the difference in meaning between being responsible for and in charge of themselves on the one hand and looking after themselves on the other may be subtle, in the context of this study where I was interested in how children take action and take charge, the stronger version or meaning is more appropriate. In the following example, “eyigangela” which suggests delinquent behaviour or going off the rails, my interpreter translated this to mean that the person in question was “corrupt”, in other words, immoral, dishonest or guilty of accepting bribes which gives a much stronger sense of the extent of his transgressions. This difference in meaning was identified because the blind translator used the word “ekhohlakele” which is a direct translation from the English meaning of “corrupt”. As we did not know the exact nature of the offences that resulted in Philani being arrested, we decided that in this context, the English should be changed to reflect a more general explanation of his behaviour that was closer to the original description provided by Nosipho Dlamini. The word “corrupt” was therefore changed to “doing bad things” in the English translation.

“It’s because Sifiso is old in age but he is just not right. He even steals stuff from the house to sell it. He steals stuff knowing that the situation is bad in the house. Philani is in jail, he was arrested because he was doing bad things...”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L153-156)

3.5.2.2 Thematic analysis

With regard to the analysis „proper’, I worked through each translated transcript line by line, reading and re-reading the text and recording my initial thoughts and observations. I then identified and labeled the themes that emerged from the text, using the specific approach utilised in this process, i.e. the analysis „proper’, as described above and in respect of the data collected, was that of thematic analysis. The aim of thematic analysis is to identify themes within the data. A distinguishing feature between this sort of analysis and straightforward content analysis is that in thematic analysis categories into which the themes are sorted are not predetermined (Ezzy, 2002). Instead, the categories of analysis emerge during the analysis. As a result this method makes it possible for new and unanticipated issues or themes to emerge. The process of naming and categorising themes was a very experimental process and some of the theme categories that initially seemed unrelated were merged in the end and others were split as I became more immersed in the data and began to distinguish similarities and differences. I then began to arrange the categories of themes together broadly around each of the research questions and to experiment with ordering and re-ordering to begin to form threads of arguments and stories.

Kvale (1996) posits that the analysis of qualitative data evidences a continuum between description and interpretation. I used both a top-down and bottom-up approach to my analysis. I drew on existing literature and research and related it to the interview data but also took notice of themes emerging from the data in a sort of movement back and forth between these two methods. I worked with one interview at a time noting recurrent themes and themes relevant to my research questions and cited examples for each. I then began to draw on similarities and differences across a number of interviews and slowly some form of structure began to emerge. After that I consolidated the most prominent themes across all of the interviews and chose the interview extracts / quotes that best exemplified a particular theme. In my analysis chapter extracts from the interviews are therefore interspersed with interpretation and references to theory. For example, larger cultural narratives about childhood, stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, gender etc. as explored in the literature that framed this

study were evident in the children's talk. I noticed that the constructs of age, gender and coming from a rural or urban area interacted with the data in interesting ways. These constructs were pervasive and therefore I did not deal with them as separate themes but rather highlighted the way that they were interwoven with many of the themes. I also paid careful attention to contradictions and gaps within the narratives, an analytic tool highlighted by Squire (2008).

Although Squire (2008) for example points out that the experience-centred narrative analytic processes, such as Crossley's (2000a), do not differ much from many other qualitative procedures such as thematic analysis, she distinguishes between thematic analysis and experience-centred narrative analysis by saying that experience-centred narrative analysis focuses on the sequences and progression of themes within interviews and their transformation and resolution. In other words, narrative thematic analysis strives to preserve a sequence and keep the story "intact" with the researcher interpreting from the case as a whole rather than from themes or categories across cases. In other words, in narrative analysis, the parts of the story are significant only within the context of the whole narrative. Thematic analysis, on the other hand, uses cross-case comparisons and focuses on themes and categories rather than people as units of analysis (Ezzy, 2002). In my approach, a common approach in qualitative research (Reissman, 2008) I created thematic categories across the interviews and identified common thematic elements across research participants in a more general thematic analysis approach. This approach may be likened by some (e.g. Reissman) to the grounded theory approach which also takes data apart in this way, however a crucial difference between grounded theory and the bottom-up and top-down approach to thematic analysis that I used, is that I did not only focus on new theoretical insights emerging from the data but also used prior theory as a resource for interpretation of the data.

Although Crossley was a useful theoretical framework for me to use in that her focus on re-introducing a sense of agency to the story teller tied in with the way that the young people I interviewed resisted some of the stereotypical pre-existent stories about children from child headed homes, the McAdams guidelines for narrative analysis that she recommends would not have been a suitable method of analysis for the fragmented and disjointed life stories that my interviewees told. The fact that these

stories were unstructured and fragmented tells a story in itself about lives characterised by constant struggle and trauma and in which it is not possible to identify one or two events that shatter a life narrative, lives in which there is not time to rebuild a new coherent and meaningful story. It instead became evident that the richness and significance of these children's stories emerged in considering them collectively.

A summary list of the themes explored in the two analysis chapters is as follows:

Chapter 4: Analysis of Family Structures and Social Networks

The main theme explored in Chapter 4 is the tension between the interviewees' perceptions of "alone-ness" and the complex adult networks within which they live, comprising extended family, community and social forms of support. Gender plays an important role here as the story that unfolds is one of women holding families together while men are, on the whole, visibly absent from the participants' support networks, particularly in respect of the urban based families.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Child/Adult, Adult/Child Status

In chapter 5 the following main themes are discussed within the context of the framing theme of Child/Adult, Adult/Child Status which explores the competence and maturity with which the participants approach their "adult" responsibilities despite their positioning as children:

Child Adults:

- Responsibility, poverty and the myth of carefree childhood
- Heads of homes as providers and custodians of family homes
- Childcare and the moral responsibility of parenting
- Democratic decision making and collective responsibility

Adult Children:

- "Voicelessness"

- Finance and housing implications and the emphasis on education as a means to attaining financial autonomy
- Vulnerability to exploitation, physical abuse and sexual abuse
- Community support versus stigmatisation and hostility

The constructs of gender, in particular, and also age and rural/urban dwelling place were pervasive and interwoven throughout the themes that emerged.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF FAMILY STRUCTURES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a descriptive analysis of the household structures of the interviewees. This first layer of analysis presents the results of an exploration of the household and support structures of the participants in the study. Initially the family diagrams were begun as a descriptive exercise simply to provide an organised summary of all the members of the households and networks of relationships beyond the immediate household. However as the study progressed it became evident that the construction of these diagrams offered a useful interpretation of the kinds of „family’ structures of these participants. It is especially interesting to see the appearance of other sources of support besides family relationships and helpful neighbours, such as teachers, community care workers and representatives of various NGOs. We see non-family members take the place of family members in certain roles or positions of significance, for example social workers representing children in terms of school arrangements. Another interesting observation is that even where there are no adults living in a household, often there are adults in the background that exert a certain degree of control and supervision over the households from the outside.

In respect of the diagrams that appear in this chapter it is necessary to outline certain assumptions made and to explain one or two of the markers from the diagram key. The first assumption is that all diagrams represent the current family structures as described by the interviewees and no deceased relatives have been included. Second, if there were any contradictions between the family descriptions of different members of the same household then the diagram presented is based on what the young person, deemed head of the household, said.

One of the challenges encountered by the researcher in producing these diagrams was the need to become familiar with a different framework of thinking about family relationships. In particular, for example, where cousins are referred to as „brothers’ or

„sisters’ and siblings of parents are culturally acknowledged as „fathers’ and „mothers’, for example:

“Zama is 19, she is my sister from another mother.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L276)

In some cases, however, I cannot be certain that the depictions of biological relationships are wholly accurate. In attempting to represent these relationships accurately it felt at times as if we were interrogating the interviewees, and asking them to do something completely unnatural.

Another observation worth mentioning at this point is the extent of fluidity and movement in family structures even in the short time that elapsed between my first and second meetings with interviewees. This also made it difficult to capture a static depiction of household structures for the diagrams. In their current forms they represent a snapshot of the families at the time of the first interviews and I have attempted to provide some sense of the movement or change in each of the written family descriptions.

The diagrams are complex and multi-layered so as to be as fully descriptive as possible. For example, as well as naming the people outside of the home with whom the household members have a relationship, the relationships are also marked in terms of the strength of the bond. Because it is interesting that support networks extend to non-family adults such as care workers it was also deemed important to differentiate between family and non-family and, in terms of family, whether they were local or not due to the observation that some households were supervised from a remote distance by adult family members. The generation marker is there to highlight where the households are one generational and to show the cross-generational support structures. Marker (3) represents the young members of the household and (4) signifies their own children. Marker (2) marks the household members’ parent’s generation, for example, their aunts and uncles and marker (1) represents the household members’ grandparent’s generation.

4.2 “Izingane ezihlala zodwa”. Kids that stay alone

This poignant phrase; “kids that stay alone”, was used by several of the young people interviewed to explain how they understood the term ‘child-headed home’.

Consideration of this feeling of ‘alone-ness’ in the context of support networks that do exist in some form or another for each of the young people interviewed demonstrates a tension between their perception of being alone and the complex ‘family’ networks within which they live.

Interviewer: *“Ok when a person says a child-headed home, how would you explain that, if a person would ask you to explain.”*

Bheka: *When they say a home where kids stay alone?”*

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L762-763; L766)

“Even when I’m at school I sit alone and I think if only my mom would be there when I come back from school but I go home and I stay alone.” (Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L51-52)

“Ok my mother passed away and then there was no one to take care of us and we ended up staying alone.” (Mabuza, Siphos 2, L395-396)

“...it’s not good for kids to stay alone because when kids are alone they have no one to help them”

(Ndebele, Mndeni 2, L612-613)

The term conjures up a sense of abandonment that comes through strongly in the following extracts from Bongani Hlanganani and Zinhle Dlamini’s interviews:

“What can I say it’s a home that has kids with no one to take care of them whereas a home with adults does have.”

Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L694-695)

“When everyone was still at home it was always nice, everything was alright but now it shows that there are people that I miss in my life.... Even if there is a problem at home I say if my mom and my aunty were still here as older people they would take

care of the problem, they would know what to do as we are all kids. There is nothing I can do so...

(Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L47-49; L58-60)

The adolescents very clearly express their experience of feeling alone although, as depicted in the family diagrams below, they may receive support from adults in various capacities. As is explored within this theme, these young people may live in homes without adults to care for them, but they are not completely ‚alone’ in the world. They do have lifelines in place to adult help outside of their homes in terms of families, neighbours and other external supports.

Perhaps this sense of being alone stems from the feeling of not having someone of their own, someone with a particular interest in them and their futures. Bheka Nkosi clearly expresses this sentiment in the below extract:

“...your aunty can never be like your mom there are things she can’t do that a mother can.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1010-1011)

And when Bongani Hlanganani is asked who is important in his life, even though he does have the help of a family aunt who lives across the road and other extended family, his sense of loss and abandonment comes through strongly when he responds:

“It used to be the parents but now they are not here so that’s the way it is”.

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L545)

Maybe what they perceive as missing is someone to guide them in the transition from youth to adulthood that has their particular interests at heart. They are, after all, more alone in finding their way than young people with parents. Thandiwe Hlanganani, for example, expresses how family and neighbours may help with their basic needs but any additional resources they may have would surely be used to help their own children to better their lives:

“...I was going to be able to study if my dad was here. My mom was unemployed but my dad worked so he could continue to pay for my studies but now I can't continue, but those kids with parents are better off because their parents are still alive. Those who help us help with food and clothes they would not have money for us to study. When we ask them to help us continue they said they only have the money to support us with food and clothes.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L2031-2036)

Francis-Chizororo (2007) notes that the issue of adult representation showed up as a crucial issue in children's struggles. She found that most children getting help from NGOs had an older person in the household who could represent them and help them access services in the community. Desmond et al (2003) point out that children may fare better in a child-headed household than in unwanted foster care or institutions, if they are under the care and supervision of distant caregivers or nearby extended family and neighbours. According to Desmond et al (2003) the vulnerability of a household can be measured by assessing the resources and capacity of the household head. However, they also emphasise the significance of household networking and the reliability or dependability of the extended family network.

There is an idea that emerged from the adolescents' own perceptions of child-headed households that it is „unnatural' for children to be completely alone and that this situation does not bode well for their lives. Thandiwe Hlanganani clearly states that she feels it is not right that they do not have an adult living with them and Bheka Nkosi offers some hypothetical scenarios of what can go wrong to demonstrate his feelings about children from child-headed homes. In the third extract from Bheka's second interview below, he implies that it should be a last resort for children to stay alone if there is no-one in the extended family to step in and look after them.

“It's a home that's not alright because an adult is needed... It's not right that we don't have a person that we stay with...”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L1377-1379)

“...you end up because when you don't stay with your parents and don't have parents anymore you end up abused and end up thinking what you do is useless because there

is no one who is encouraging you and seconding you that when you have done something right no one tells you have done something right and when you have done something wrong.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1671-1675)

“...they [children from child-headed homes] end up quitting school because they have no one who stays with them and end up in lots of trouble that they end up robbing people because there is no one who is going to guide them that stays with them like an adult.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1685-1688)

“It’s a family that’s not ok even spiritually and family values and the family doesn’t get along there are arguments that’s why kids end up being alone and end up leaving home and living on the streets.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L782-784)

The situation, alluded to in Bheka’s extract immediately above, of adults in the extended family not taking in orphaned children, may result from the fact that no relative could be identified to take them. Another possibility is that the extended family is already stretched to capacity in terms of their available resources and they are therefore unable to take on the burden of additional children. A further reason identified by Foster et al (1997) for children and adolescents living in child or adolescent headed households rather than with the extended family may be that this reflects the wishes of the parent and/or the children. Foster et al (1997) explain that many parents and children would prefer the children to live as a child-headed household rather than risk losing the family home and other property. Additionally, children often wish to stay together and this is not always possible if care of the children is taken on by extended family members. Some relatives also prefer to provide assistance and support to orphans that continue to live in their own (parents’) homes (Foster et al, 1997 & Germann cited in Francis-Chizororo, 2007), or the children live close enough to relatives that the relatives can visit their homes regularly (Foster et al, 1997). Thandiwe Hlanganani in fact implies that she thinks the reason for people in their community “not looking at them in an unpleasant” way is that even

though they have lost their parents they do still have their own home, making them less of a burden:

Interviewer: *“Do you think there is a certain unpleasant way that kids who stay alone are looked at in this community? You know like maybe when they see them they say oh here are those kids who stay alone.”*

Thandiwe: *“There isn’t because...if they had a problem with us they would have told us when we ask for things and the fact that we stay in our house and we don’t stay there and there helps.”*

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L1834-1836; L1847-1849)

In some cases extended families are *not* supportive, such as in the example cited by Bheka that implies that their relationship with his family at Ntuzuma is not good:

“We have lived here since the relatives we have are not so close to us, they were relatives because they were from the same parents but spiritually we are not ok. The ones we have live in Ntuzuma, we visit and come back, it’s just that when you visit your relatives sometimes you lose interest in visiting them because of the way you are treated.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L152-156)

The idea of what the participants want for their own families and how they envisage protecting their own unborn children from the hardships that they themselves have experienced emphasises the importance they place on family. They aspire to the more intact family lives that they once had when their parent(s) were there to take care of them.

“What I can do is find a proper job and make sure that my next family that I would have, if I happen to die they would get money perhaps from my work.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1620-1621)

“It’s different because I would have money and do whatever I want to do and look after my family, maybe they wouldn’t have to live the way that I have lived.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L664-665)

4.3 The Dlamini family

Figure 1 below presents the river diagram of the Dlamini family in Cato Manor.

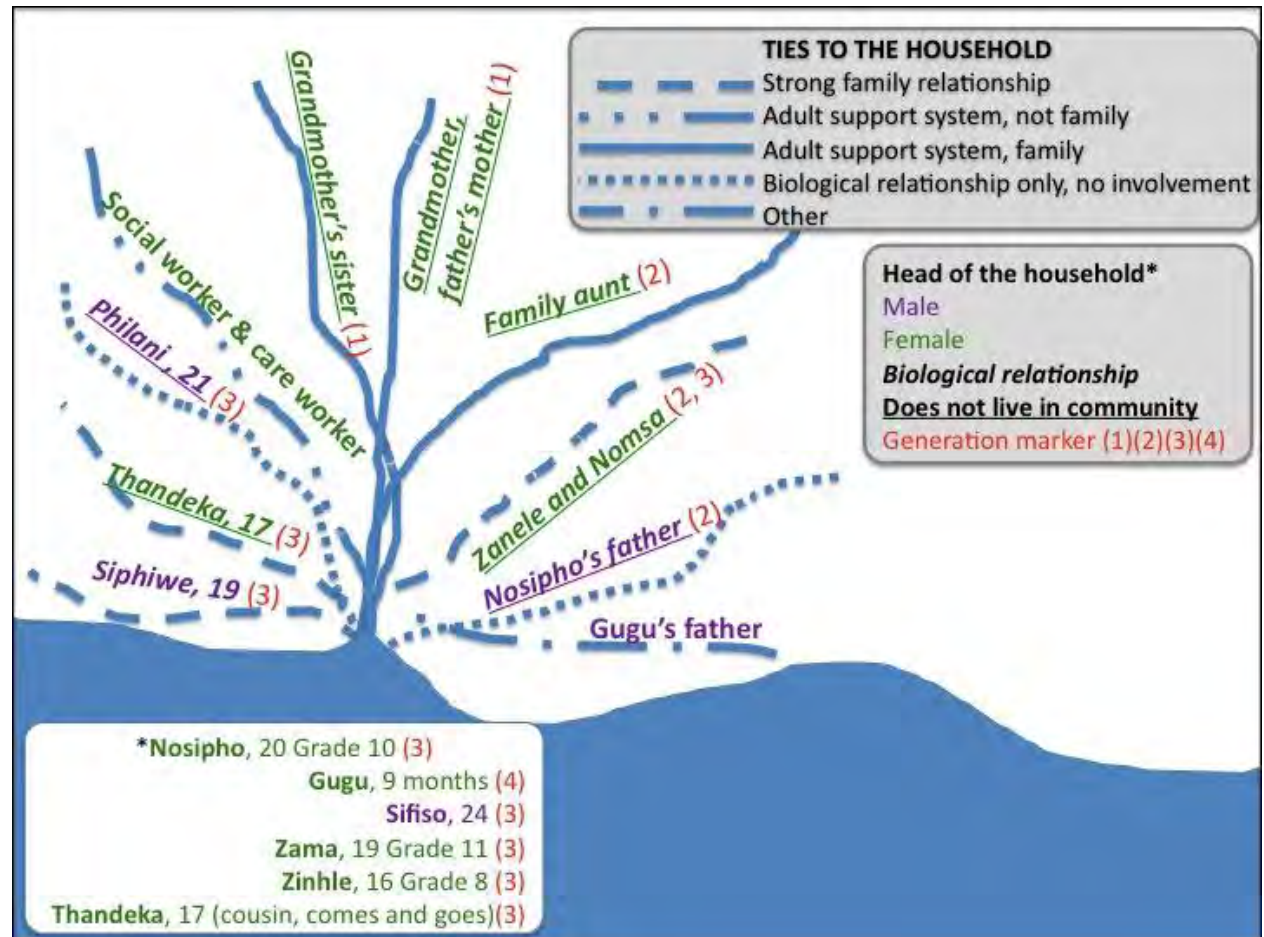


Figure 1: The Dlamini Family

As can be seen in the diagram above, the Dlamini family household is headed by Nosipho, a girl of 20, in Grade 10. She lives with her 16-year-old sister, Zinhle, who is in Grade 8, her 19-year-old cousin (her mother's sister's daughter), Zama, who is in Grade 11, another cousin of 24, Sifiso (her mother's other sister's son) and Gugu, Nosipho's own 9-month-old daughter.

Another cousin, Thandeka (Sifiso's 17-year-old sister) does not permanently live in the household, but comes and goes. Thandeka and Sifiso have another brother, 19-

year-old Siphwe. Siphwe lives with a friend in uMlazi but still has strong associations with the household, bringing food when he can afford to from the 'piece' jobs he does. Thandeka, Sifiso and Siphwe have another 21-year-old brother who is in jail. Zama also has a sister who lives with her daughter on a farm in Richmond.

Nosipho took on the responsibility of caring for her family in 2006 when her mother passed away. Nosipho's mother was the last of three sisters to pass away. At the time of her death she was already taking care of her sisters' children as well as her own.

“My grandmother passed away first and then there was only my mom and my aunts, three of them remaining. Then my aunty's child died, then the middle aunty,, Thandeka and Sifiso's mother and then only my mom and my small aunty remained. Then in 2006 my aunty passed in October then my mom in December, that's how we ended up staying alone.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L136-140)

Nosipho and the family members that reside with her on a permanent basis are currently living in an emergency tent in Chesterville extension, awaiting the building of the RDP house that Nosipho's mother applied for before she died, back on the site of the shack they used to live in in Cato Manor. In the meantime, Nosipho, Zinhle and Zama have over an hour's walk to their school in Overport through an area that is known in the community for being unsafe.

The absence of fathers is very apparent in the story of this matrilineal family that has been held together by women or mothers:

“My mom passed away and my mothers [aunts] until all of them were gone, then we were left alone, we don't know our fathers. Nosipho only found hers recently.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L106-107).

Nosipho's father lives in Mandini. He has never lived with them. She has only had contact with him within the past year and he does not offer them any support. Likewise, following through into the next generation, the father of Nosipho's own daughter, Gugu, who lives locally, does not offer her any child-care support. Gugu

qualifies for the child support grant which Nosipho now claims, however, this barely covers Gugu's day care costs while Nosipho is at school.

The household is held together by the girls with the only permanent male inhabitant (Sifiso, 24) not contributing to the family. The other male family members of this generation do not currently reside with the family:

Interviewer: *“You say you are the oldest but there are some boys in the family that were older than you so how did it come about that you become the one that looks after everyone?”*

Nosipho: *“It's because Sifiso is old in age but he is just not right. He even steals stuff from the house to sell it. He steals stuff knowing that the situation is bad in the house. Philani is in jail, he was arrested because he was doing bad things. So now only Siphwe is there. He helps us when he gets a job and that's how it ended up being me.”*

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L145-146; L153-156)

Significant adults mentioned in the interviews were a ,grandmother' from the Eastern Cape, the maternal Grandmother's sister; her paternal grandmother, and an aunt:

Interviewer: *“So the grandmother from Eastern Cape and the one from uMlazi and your aunty what role do they play in your life?”*

Zinhle: *“Aunty is always complaining that she doesn't have money so there is no role she plays in my life. The one from Eastern Cape is too far and she has other grandchildren that she takes care of with her pension money. The one from uMlazi, when I ask for money, the one from uMlazi does give me.”*

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L484-485, L491-494)

Although the above extract from Zinhle's interview suggests that the grandmothers and the aunt are thought about purely in terms of potential financial support, the following suggests something more than that. When asked what role the Grandmother from uMlazi plays in her life, Zama answers:

“None, but when I have a serious problem that I cannot handle, that I can’t even share with Nosipho or even if I tell her she doesn’t know what to do, I phone her and tell her that I have a problem and can she help me in a way that she can help me. Maybe she would tell me I should do this and that. Even at school if there is something we have done they call her to come there.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L359-363)

In other words, when an adult is really needed, she is called in to offer advice and guidance. The household is not eligible for child support grants for any of the household members other than Nosipho’s nine-month-old daughter because they are all over the cut-off age. They are not receiving any other Government grants but they occasionally receive help from the social worker and voluntary community care-worker. Nosipho’s mother was due some money from her employer for long-term service but the money is being withheld because Nosipho is not yet 21.

4.4 The Luthuli family

Figure 2 below presents the river diagram of the Luthuli family in Cato Manor.

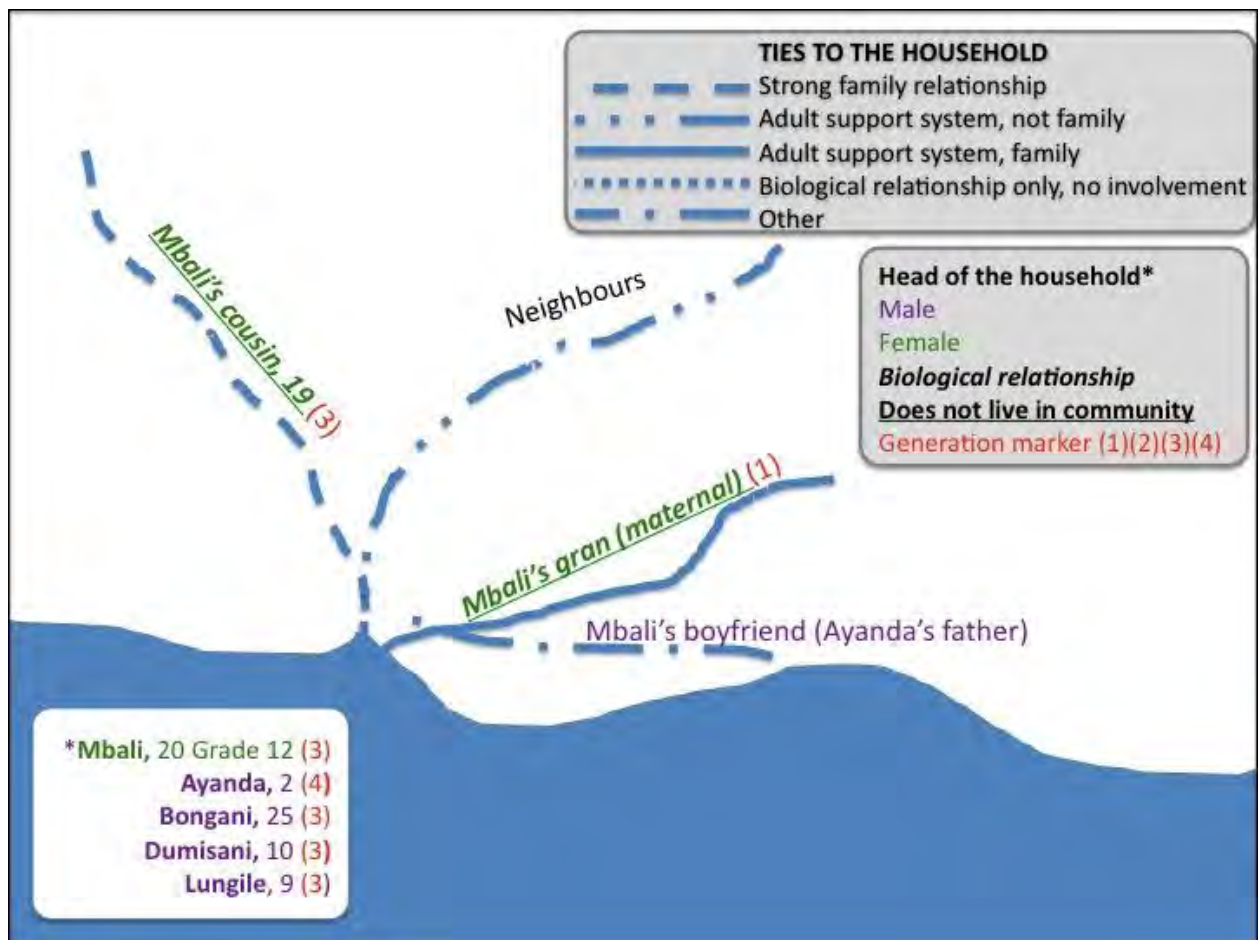


Figure 2: The Luthuli Family

The Luthuli family household is headed by Mbali, a girl of 20, in Grade 12. She lives with her two younger half brothers, Dumisani and Lungile, from the same mother but a different father, aged 10 and 9 years respectively and an older male cousin or „family brother’ of 25 years old. He is the son of her mother’s older sister and was already living with the family at the time of the mother’s death, as his own mother passed away prior to this. At the time of the first interview, there was also a female cousin or „family sister’ of 19 years, in Grade 11, staying with the family, although she was visiting and does not live there on a permanent basis. In the second interview Mbali mentioned that her cousin was doing her matric on the farm and was likely to visit again soon; maybe even come to stay the following year after finishing school. This family sister also had a young toddler with her.

Mbali has a son of her own of two years old, however, this only emerged during the second interview with her. He was born in 2007 before her mother passed away and

before her death, Mbali's mother helped to look after him. Mbali's mother died in September 2007. Prior to this they lived with her in the same house from 2003. Before moving to stay with her mother she lived in Maphumulo with her grandmother, but then joined her mother to go to school in Mayville. At first they lived together in an emergency shack nearby while they waited for their RDP house to be built. She never knew her father.

The 25-year-old „family brother' is not currently working. Mbali says the problem is that he has applied several times for an ID document but still does not have one. The family's primary source of income is the child support grants that Mbali claims for her two younger half brothers and for her own child. They also receive monthly food parcels from the school. There is no family living nearby and they do not receive any help from social or community careworkers.

The most significant adult in Mbali's life, as shown in the above diagram by the solid line marker representing a strong and supportive family tie, is her grandmother who lives in Maphumulo, with whom she lived as a young child. Her grandmother currently supports a number of other grandchildren back in Maphumulo. This family is a tragic example of the middle generation being lost and the grandmother left with the burden of caring for all of her grandchildren.

Interviewer: *“Who lives with your granny?”*

Mbali: *She is staying with her grandchildren or she is staying with kids that have been left by her children.*

Interviewer: *Ok where did her children go to?*

Mbali: *They all passed away. My mom was the last born, she was the only one left, but now she is also gone, they're all gone.”*

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L755-763)

There is also Mbali's boyfriend who lives nearby and who sometimes helps them with money and food. Mbali also mentions a girl from the community that finished school the year before and who is studying further that helps Mbali with her school work when she finds it difficult and neighbours, who used to visit when her mother was still alive, who continue to check on her.

The first time we interviewed Mbali she did not reveal that she had a child of her own. There was a toddler she said was her sister's and one that we were told didn't live there but had been left by a friend to be taken care of. In the second interview, however, when clarifying who lived with her, she did mention her two-year-old son.

The first interview was in Mbali's home. It was very chaotic and there were many interruptions by the toddlers who were crying and agitated. Mbali was on edge and very distracted as well. The „family sister' was in an adjoining room and could hear everything. She even answered a question about the male cousin's age from the other room.

The second time we interviewed Mbali was at the Cato Crest library at the beginning of 2009 when she had just finished school and was now looking for a job. We learned after the interview that she had failed her matric.

Her home appears to be a Durban base for her extended family. She is expecting the „family sister' that stayed before to return, perhaps permanently, after finishing school and she has also had news of some of her other cousins coming from the farm in Maphumulo possibly in search of work in Durban. This idea of movement between spaces, particularly rural and urban spaces is well documented (e.g. Jones, 1993; Russell, 2004) and is most often related to work. It is also interesting to see how Mbali's household is a one-generational household with the exception of her own child, as indicated by the generation marker in the diagram, however her grandmother is a strong adult support figure who is very much a part of what she considers to be her family. This reveals how connections that span generations often exist across different household spaces even if there are no adults actually present in the home. This presents a new type of family structure that is very different from the social normative perspective of family structure based on the Western idea of nuclear family as well as the broader African notion of family that places more emphasis on the extended family. This presents an example of what Burman (1994) is implying when she claims that we are beginning to see many more family structures due to changes in our society.

4.5 The Hlanganani family

Figure 3 below presents the river diagram of the Hlanganani family in Cato Manor.

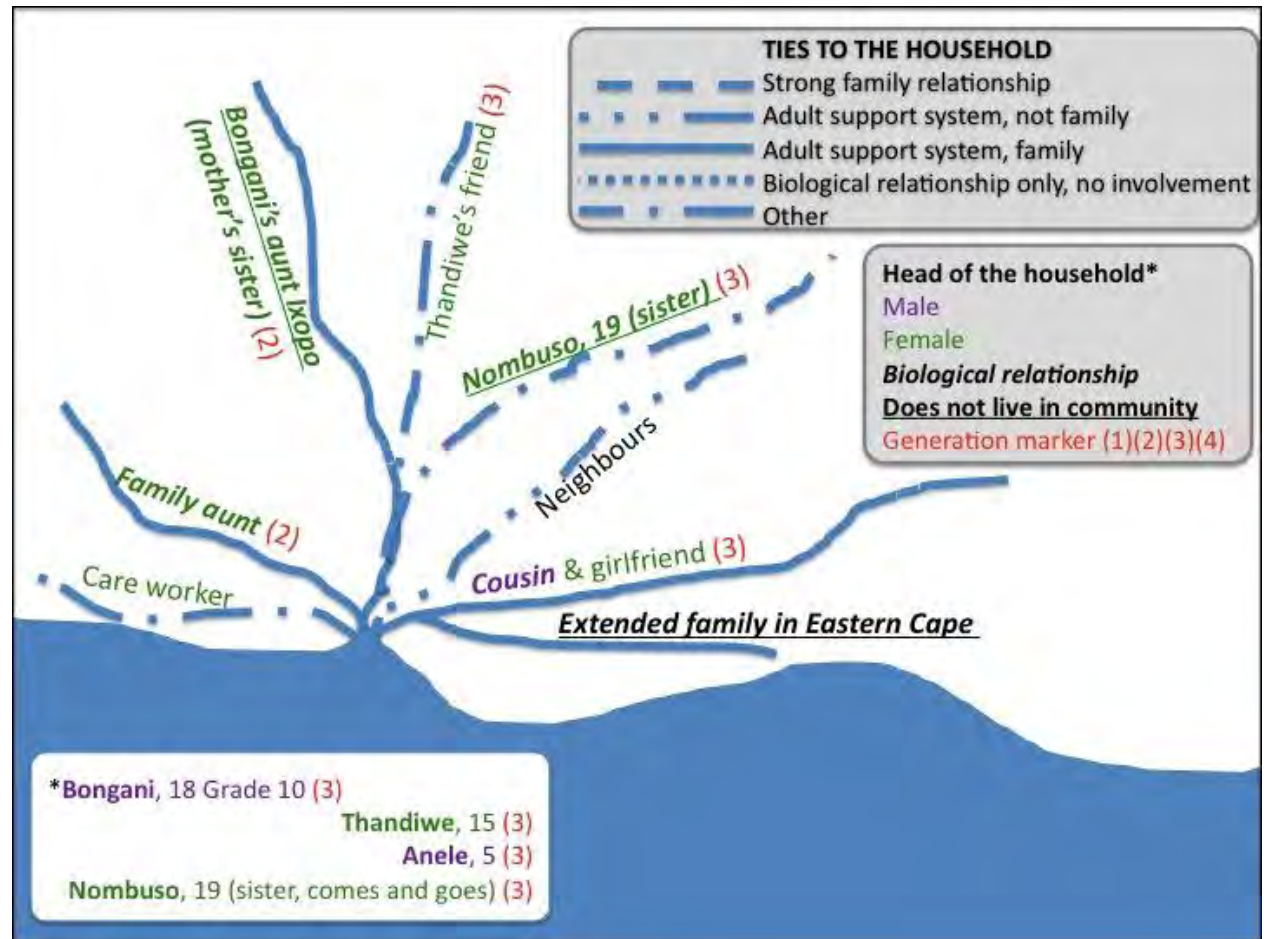


Figure 3: The Hlanganani Family

The Hlanganani household is headed by Bongani, a boy of 18 in Grade 10. He lives with his younger sister, Thandiwe, who is 15 and a younger brother, Anele, who is only five. They also have an older sister, Nombuso, who is 19 and who does not permanently reside with them but comes and goes between their home and her boyfriend's house.

The young family has an aunt that lives across the road from them and is very involved in their lives. Bongani explains that she “checks up” on them (Hlanganani,

Bongani 1, L157). Initially when asked who is important in his life Bongani replies that it used to be his parents but that now his aunt is helping them.

“It used to be the parents but now they are not here....They were important because they were parents. It’s now this aunt who keeps on helping us bit by bit.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L543; L552-553)

The family lives in a home that used to belong to Bongani’s parents. According to Bongani his parents registered for a RDP house and their aunt signed for it when it was their number to get the house because by then both his parents had died.

“...it was the number for us to get a house but now she [the aunt] owns it.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L218)

Locally there is also a community careworker that acts as the central point for many of the food and clothes donations that come into the area from various churches and NGOs and Bongani cites her as someone that is important in his life since she “puts stuff together” for them (Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L131-132). He also says that there is food at school that is given to anyone who wants to take it and both Bongani and Thandiwe say that their neighbours and friends from school help them. Thandiwe in particular mentions a cousin and his girlfriend that live nearby and who she likes to visit.

“Yes there is one [a community care worker] who visits us...She normally helps us....She helps us with food.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L204; L210).

Bongani talks about his extended family in the Eastern Cape as well. He says that they are in contact with them and there is an aunt that they call on there for help and she helps them although they do not visit there often because money is scarce. Thandiwe said in her first interview that they see this aunt in December but that they talk to her often from their neighbour’s phone. She says that this aunt sends them money on one of the Ixopo taxis for school fees and transport and they go and fetch it when it gets to Durban. Thandiwe discloses in her account that the aunt from the Eastern Cape’s own

children have all died. Bongani talks about how he lived with his family in the Eastern Cape before he moved to his parents' place in Cato Manor and started school. Before moving to Cato Manor permanently he used to visit his parents there from "the farms".

In a good example of how non biological support takes the place of family, Bongani explains how his support networks include people on the „outside' who help him. Desmond et al (2003) claim that it is common for child or adolescent headed households to receive support and help from members of their communities. He expresses what it has meant to him having them there even if they are not family. Because other people have helped him he says:

“When I have grown being in my situation has taught me to take care of other people who are in trouble just like you cause you know how it feels to be there.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1730-1731)

Thandiwe spoke more than Bongani about the circumstances around the time that their parents died. She said that her parents had separated before her mother died and that their father, who had been staying with another woman, came back after their mother died. He then also passed away.

They are not claiming a Child Support Grant for five-year-old Anele. According to Thandiwe there is no one to represent them to apply for the grant. She says she has an ID book but she is not 18 yet and she thinks that it is necessary to be over 18, to have an ID and the same surname as the child for whom one is claiming the grant. She explains that the aunt from the Eastern Cape should be able to apply as an older person but that she has a different surname to Anele. She says, however, that this aunt and their cousin together pay for Anele's crèche.

Bongani was particularly reserved during his interviews and they are dotted with one word answers and "uhuh" in place of "yes". Many contradictions were observed between the family descriptions and histories given by Bongani and Thandiwe respectively. This was possibly due to mistrust of us, the researcher and interpreter, as outsiders. In his first interview Bongani clearly says that his younger brother, Anele,

is 10. This is discordant with his second interview when he said that Anele was 6. In Thandiwe's interviews she states that Anele is 4. The diagram therefore assumes that Anele was 5 at the time of the first interviews based on a rough average when taking all of the interviews into account. Another particularly striking example of such a contradiction is the discrepancy between the stories about where the little brother, Anele, fits in. Bongani clearly states in his second interview that Anele was not his mother's child. He says he is his sister, Nombuso's child, the one that stays with her boyfriend and comes and goes from their home. He says that before she died his mother was taking care of Anele as well. He says that Nombuso used to visit her boyfriend when their mother was still alive, but that she used to do this behind her back, and when their mother died she went to stay with him. He says that her boyfriend is Anele's father. Thandiwe does not acknowledge an older sister in her account, saying that there is only herself, Bongani and Anele and no other siblings. She says that Nombuso is her nickname and Thandiwe is her real name, therefore implying that her brother, Bongani, was referring to her when he spoke about both Nombuso and Thandiwe. The person she talks about that sometimes stays with them and sometimes with her boyfriend, she says, is in fact not a biological relative but someone with the same surname as her mother. Initially in her second interview she also says that Anele has the same mother and father as her and Bongani but then later in the same interview clarifies that Anele has the same mother but a different father from them. It is unclear why these two young people would have contradicting stories about how Anele fits in to the family structure, however, Thandiwe did tell a story about how initially her mother thought she was pregnant with her father's child and later discovered that he was actually the child of another boyfriend. My interpreter and I both felt that maybe Bongani told the story of Anele being the child of an older sister for the same reason that Thandiwe initially said that he had the same father as she and Bongani: to protect her mother from whatever scandal may have occurred at the time it was discovered by neighbours and relatives that her pregnancy with Anele resulted from an affair she had with another man. It is evident from the other contradictions in respect of family members and their ages that at least one of these young people was performing a version of their story

4.6 The Nkosi family

Figure 4 below presents the river diagram of the Nkosi family in Cato Manor.

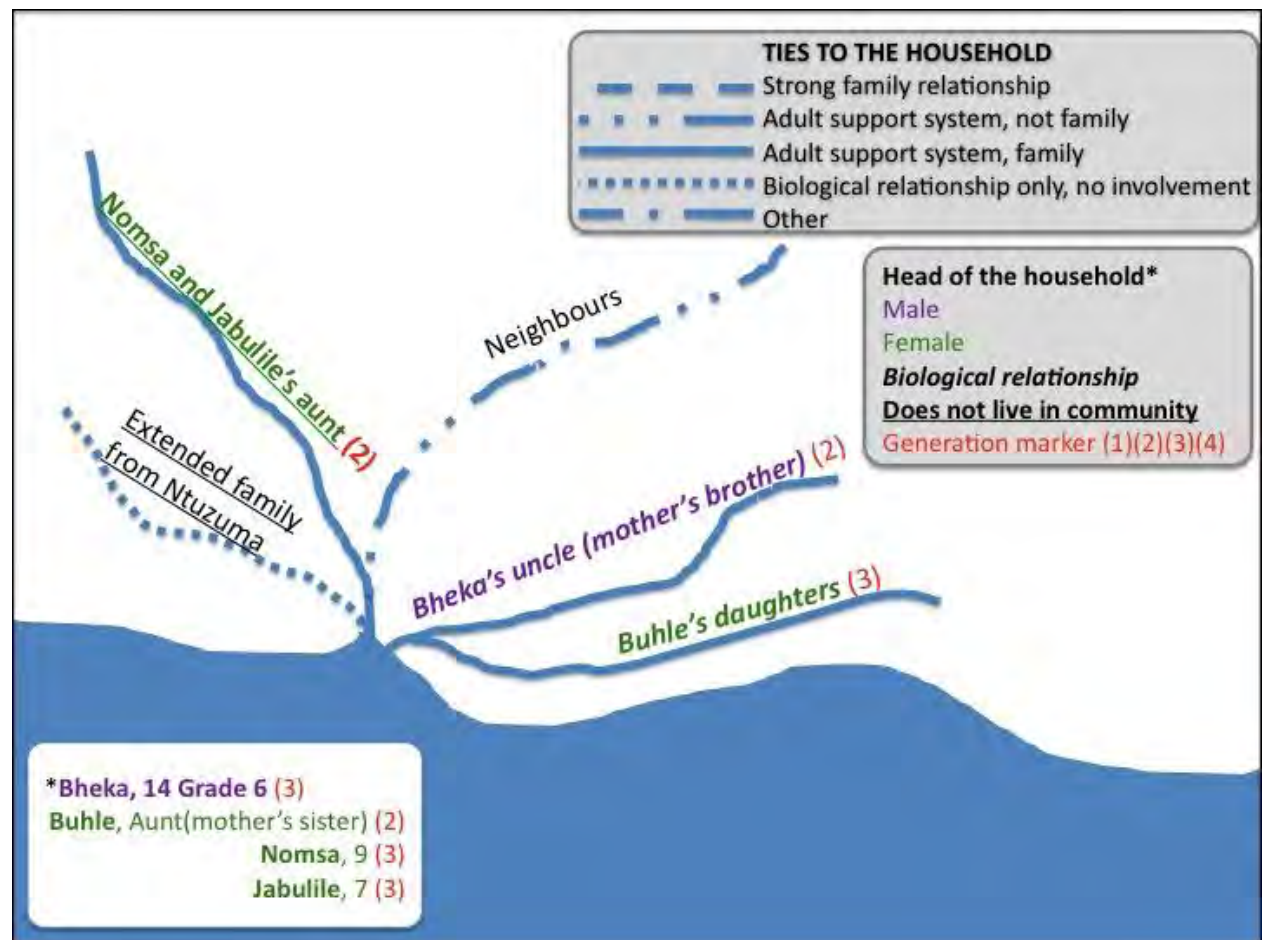


Figure 4: The Nkosi Family

The eldest child in the Nkosi family household is Bheka, a boy of 14, in Grade 6. He lives with his two younger sisters, Nomsa and Jabulile, of 9 and 7 respectively and an aunt (their mother's sister) that moved in with them after their mother died. There is also mention in Bheka's first interview of his aunt's 'husband' [boyfriend] who had a peripheral part in his story, providing money at times when he had part time jobs. He had disappeared by the second interview. Bheka was the only household member interviewed due to the fact that both of his sisters were too young to be interviewed on ethical grounds. Bheka was 10 years old when his mother died in front of him and he lost his father as well within a short space of time.

"No there is space of six to seven months, I don't remember clearly but they passed away one after the other."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L182-183)

Bheka explains the circumstances surrounding their aunt coming to live with them as follows:

“She came because of the situation, it was after my mom’s funeral, and then my aunty came because she was at the funeral and she came back home with us. She had part time jobs just for us to go to bed with something in our stomach.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L372-373)

Interviewer: *“Ok so your aunty is the one who came back with you right after the funeral?”*

Bheka: *“Yes....yes because she was the person we were going to sleep with that day.”*

Interviewer: *“And then she stayed after that?”*

Bheka: *“Yes we ended up staying together.”*

Interviewer: *“So for your aunt to come and stay with you was there a way that you were told that she is going to come and stay with you or she just came to stay with you or did the family discuss it?”*

Bheka: *“I think they sat down as a family, together as a family, and talked about how the kids are alone, can’t she come and help us so that we can have someone to cook for us.”*

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L376; L379; L384; L387; L390; L664-666; L671-672)

Bheka related that prior to moving in with him and his siblings after their mother’s funeral his aunt lived in his grandfather’s house but there has since been a family rift. He does not know whether his aunt had a job before she came to stay with them in Cato Manor.

“She stayed at at my grandfather’s place, they used to be one family but they split up because of arguments.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L592-593)

Interviewer: *“Did she work before she came to stay with you in Cato?”*

Bheka: *“I don't know hey at the time my mom passed away my mind wasn't working fine I didn't ask her many things or if she worked.”*

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L641, L648-649)

The Nkosi family was not excluded from the research despite the fact that there is an adult currently residing in the home due to the circumstances that were communicated by the community care worker that identified this family as a child-headed family. The community care worker knew the family for some time before the mother passed away. She had been ill for a while and was heavily dependent on Bheka to take care of her and his sisters for some time before she died. Although his aunt moved in with the family after his mother's funeral and became a physical adult presence in the home, and the added sense of security of having her there does come through in Bheka's talk, this did not appear to have reduced the extent of his actual and perceived responsibilities. Bheka's aunt is unwell and frail herself, a stranger in the community, and despite doing a few odd jobs here and there when she is well enough, she has no regular income and limited resources. This ties in with the recognition by Desmond et al (2003) that not all child-headed households are ‚adultless‘. However in this case Bheka does not appear to be much better off than the other young people interviewed despite having an adult presence in his home. Also considering the circumstances around which she came to live there, it is unclear whether she did so with the primary aim of caring for her deceased relative's children or because she needed a new place to go herself after the rift with her family that Bheka makes reference to in one of his interviews. The care worker who introduced this family was particularly concerned about the children and implied that she did not feel that the aunt had taken on a supportive, nurturing or ‚adult‘ role in the home. Although in Bheka's talk he does hint at the fact that his responsibilities have not been reduced by the constant presence of his aunt in their lives, and that life is a daily struggle with poverty, it does come through at times that he does depend on her living there and that there is a sense of security in there being an adult presence.

The family lives in a shack in Cato Manor on a site that was given to the children's mother by their grandfather (her father) when she left Bheka's father. When Bheka's mother took the children to live with her in Cato Manor his father stayed on in Ntuzuma.

“My mother took us to come and stay here and my dad stayed in Ntuzuma because we used to all stay in Ntuzuma.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L227-229)

Interviewer: *“Oh have you ever stayed with your dad?”*

Bheka: *“Yes but there was a disagreement between the two of them and my mom asked for a house from her dad and he got her a house here in Mayville.”*

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L238; L242-243)

Bheka’s mother registered for a RDP house in her name before she died. The family is currently waiting for their RDP house to be built. Bheka explains that his aunt will sign for the house when it is ready as the adult that is taking care of them.

“When we get the house my aunty is going to take care of it because she is our relative and she is the one who is raising us and who is trying to make things work for us.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L307-309)

In the first interview the two younger sisters lived with him but by the second they had been moved to stay with another aunt due to the scarcity of the family’s resources.

“...but my two younger sisters don’t stay with us anymore, their aunty who is their father’s sister, they stay in Matatiele, they go to school there, so for now at home there is only me, aunty and my older uncle who didn’t stay with us last year, he came recently, we stay with him at home....For now what made my little sisters move it’s because my aunt couldn’t fulfill some of the needs and the aunt from Matatiele because she has a better job then she took them because she even bought them uniforms as well.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L22-25; L694-696)

The significant adults in Bheka's life are the aunt that lives with him and provides for some of the family's needs when she does have money, although she does not have a regular income, and the unemployed uncle (also a sibling to his mother) that moved in with them during the time that we were in contact with him between his first and his second interview. He also mentions his aunt's grown up daughters that have part time jobs and sometimes help them out by taking them bread when they go to visit.

"...she [his aunt] is a person who normally does part time jobs, I can't say she has a proper job because there are days when she doesn't work....Part time jobs like she would be called to go and do washing and get money so we are able to buy bread and eat in the morning."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L626-627; L634-635)

At the time of the first interview when Bheka's younger sisters were still living with him, his aunt claimed the Child Support Grant for them. When asked about the significant adults in his life there was no mention by Bheka of having had any contact with social workers or community careworkers. In a sense this is strange because a community care worker that knows the family situation well introduced us to the family so we know they had had contact with her, but it is possible that she was more involved with the family and making regular visits when their mother was ill before she died. He does talk about extended family from Ntuzuma but explains that his relationship with them is not good and he does not appear to derive any comfort or support by having contact with them.

"We have lived here since the relatives we have are not so close to us, they were relatives because they were from the same parents but spiritually we are not ok. The ones we have live in Ntuzuma, we visit and come back, it's just that when you visit your relatives sometimes you lose interest in visiting them because of the way you are treated."

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L152-156)

4.7 The Mabuza family

Figure 5 below presents the river diagram of the Mabuza family from Umlalazi, a rural village near Eshowe.

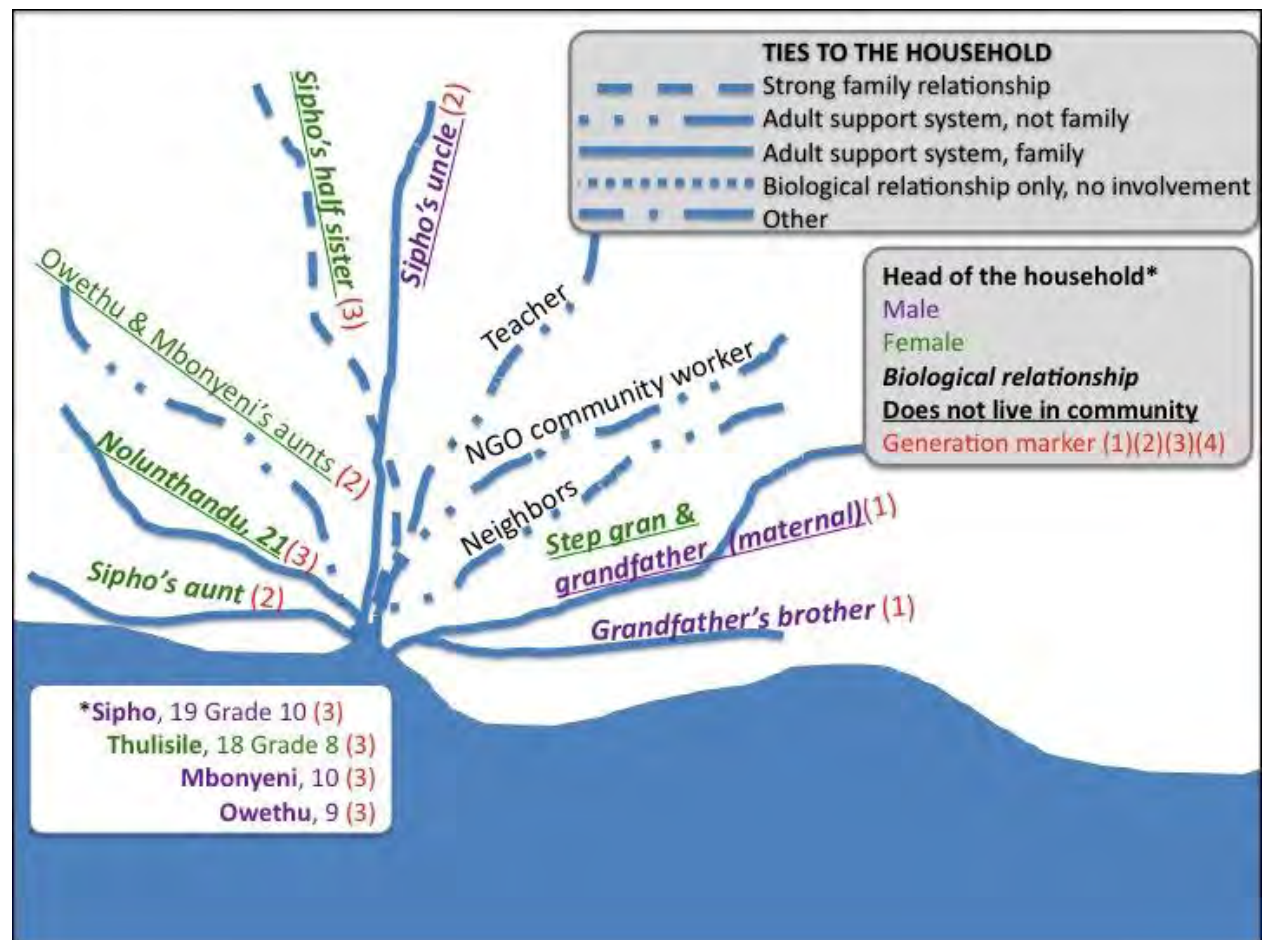


Figure 5: The Mabuza Family

The Mabuza family household is headed by Sipho, a boy of 19, in Grade 10, as seen in the above diagram. He lives with his 18-year-old sister, Thulisile, who is in Grade 8, in Umlalazi, a rural village near Eshowe in KZN. Sipho was born in Nkandla and lived there until 1994. The family then moved to the village where he currently lives near Eshowe at around the time he started preschool.

“When I hear...they say after my dad passed away my grandfather [on the mother’s side] bought a house for her [his mother] so that she can come and live here.”

(Mabuza, Sipho 2, L63-64).

Sipho has an older sister of 21 who got married and moved to Durban in mid-2008 where she finished her studying and now has a job. Arrangements for the marriage had already been made and the “ilobola” paid before their mother’s death in January 2008.

Sipho took on the responsibility of caring for his family in 2008. His mother passed away in January and his older sister moved away from home to be with her husband in the middle of that same year. His own father had passed away years earlier in 1991 or 1992, and in between his death and his mother’s, his mother had re-married and had two other children, Mbonyeni and Owethu. Sipho and Thulisile’s step-father is now also deceased.

When we first interviewed Sipho, he and Thulisile also had their two step-brothers, Mbonyeni and Owethu, of 10 and 9 respectively, living with them. The 21-year-old married sister, Nolunthandu, living in Durban had applied for the child support grant for the two younger step-brothers which she would claim and send to Thulisile who, in turn, would give the money to her aunt to buy the things that they needed. All four siblings shared the same mother but the two younger boys had a different father. When we returned for the second interview, the step-brothers had been taken away to be looked after by their father’s family.

“Their aunties took them because their dad passed away and my mom is not here anymore as well so they decided to take them and stay with them cause we don’t have anyone that helps us so they did that to take the load off us.”

(Mabuza, Sipho 2, L682-684).

Thulisile also mentions a half sister (they have the same mother but different fathers) that is younger than her that lives with her family in Nkandla but this sister is not mentioned in either of Sipho’s interviews.

Another change in circumstances between the first and second interviews is that when we first interviewed Sipho and Thulisile, they were both living in their homestead on a full time basis. They slept in two separate buildings, Sipho in one and Thulisile and the younger half brothers in the other, on a full time basis. This is a customary

arrangement in traditional Zulu homesteads for the men to have separate quarters from the women and children. On the second visit, Siphon told us that, although Thulisile still lives at the homestead in the day, she sleeps at the neighbour's house to keep her safe from potential intruders at night.

Since the younger half brothers have moved to their father's family the household is no longer eligible for child support grants because all household members are over the cut-off age. They are not receiving any other Government grants but they do receive some help with food, blankets, clothes, school stationery and so on from the NGO operating in the area that first connected us with the family. There are no social workers or community workers involved with the family. To help support them, Siphon also runs a small tuck shop with a friend and does some labour jobs in the school holidays arranged by a neighbour.

Significant adults in Siphon's extended family are his uncle (his mother's half brother from the same father), and grandfather and step grandmother on his mother's side, both of whom live in Durban. There is also a teacher from his school to whom he says he can talk and who helps him with food. Some of the neighbours help take care of his sister and help him with holiday work and food.

There is also a family aunt, Siphon's uncle's wife on his mother's side, that lives across the road and who Thulisile describes in her interview as the "one who it was said is supposed to take care of them". Another, „younger grandfather' who has taxis and lives in the nearby village of Nkombi helps with food as well. As Siphon said he is not in contact with any of his deceased father's relatives, it is assumed that this grandfather was on the mother's side as well; possibly the mother's step father or one of her father's brothers.

Interviewer: *“Are there any relatives from your father's side that you are still in contact with?”*

Siphon: *“No I don't even know one.”*

(Mabuza, Siphon 2, L90; L93)

Although we had two interviews with Sipho, Thulisile was only available for the first. When we went back to Eshowe to interview the family a second time, Thulisile had gone to town with the neighbours whose home she now sleeps in at night. We tried again to reschedule but we were told then that she was very unwell and had gone to stay with a family aunt.

4.8 The Ndebele family

Figure 6 below presents the river diagram of the Ndebele family from Umlalazi, a rural village near Eshowe.

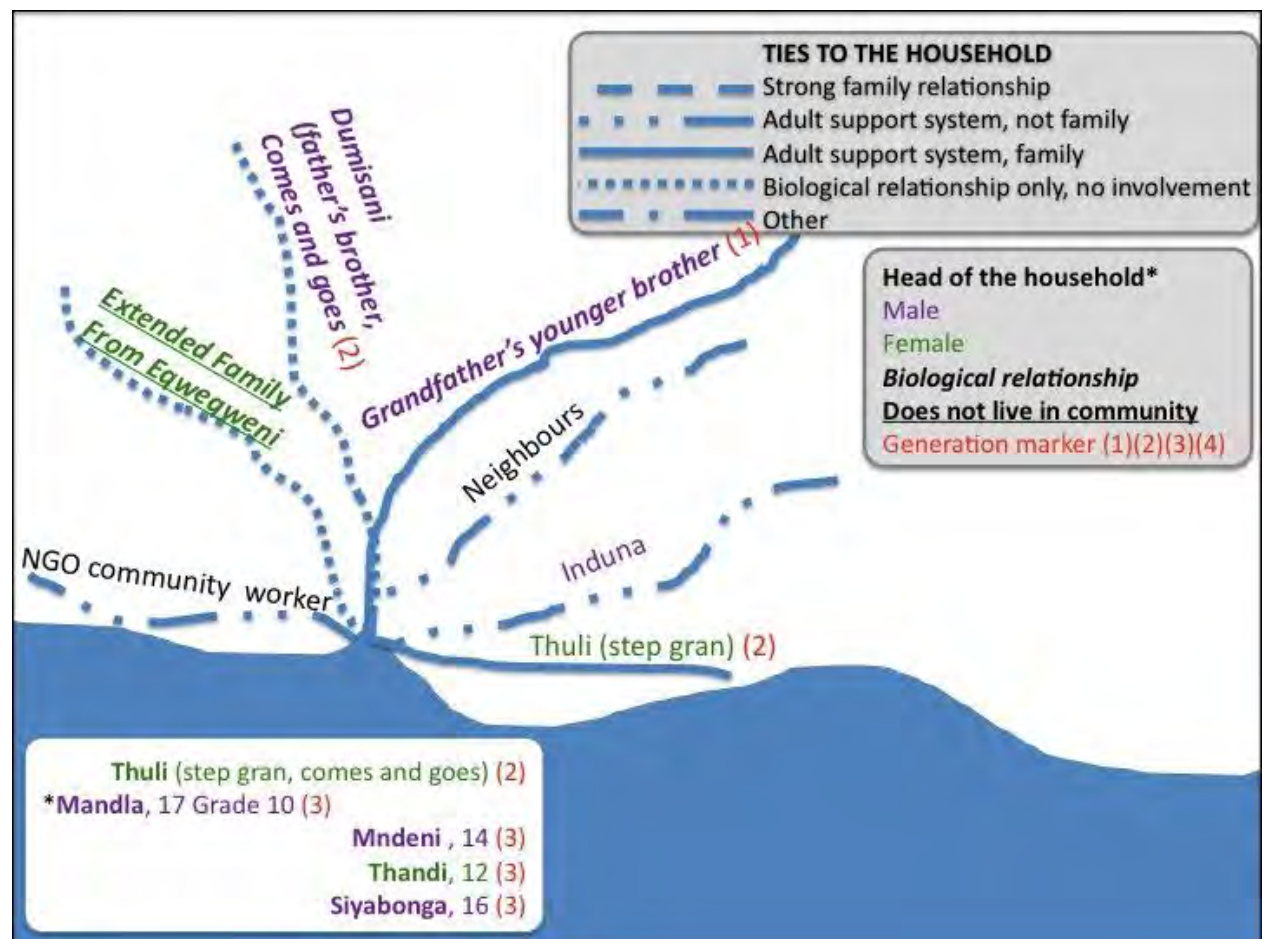


Figure 6: The Ndebele Family

The head of the Ndebele household is a boy of 17 in grade 10, Mandla. He lives with his brother, Mndeni, of 14 in grade 8, his sister, Thandi, of 12 and a cousin, 16 year old Siyabonga, Mandla's uncle's son who is only mentioned in Mandla's and Mndeni's second interview. It is therefore assumed that he went to live with them

after we met them for the first round of interviews. Mndeni also mentions an uncle that comes and goes from their home but this uncle was not mentioned in Mandla's account. Only Mandla and Mndeni from the Ndebele household were interviewed because Thandi was under 14. They have a step grandmother that comes and goes between her family's home and theirs. Mndeni says that she stays with them for a few months at a time. According to Mandla's account, the children lived alone for two years before their step grandmother came to be with them. He explains that when his grandfather's wife passed away his paternal grandfather (now deceased) took a second wife and she is the one that went to stay with them because there was no one else. He relates that his step grandmother is still young and that her own mother is still alive.

He says that when his step grandmother is staying with them, she controls the money and buys them food and clothes but when she is away then this responsibility is left to him. He speaks very fondly of her, saying:

"She is like a mother and a father. That's the role she plays."

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L936)

The supportive presence of Mandla's step grandmother presents an example of what Desmond et al (2003) are referring to when they argue that the absence of an adult head does not necessarily mean that there is no adult supervision and support. Mandla implies in his account that the step grandmother keeps an eye on them as well as taking care of them in many ways. He explains that his uncle asked her to stay with them because it was not right for them to stay alone.

Mandla tells how he stayed with his mother's side of the family when he was younger. When she passed away they had to live with their uncle and he describes this as being a particularly hard time when they used to sometimes go to bed with no food. After both his parents passed away they moved to their current dwelling that belonged to their grandfather and stayed alone. At that time he relates how even going to school was difficult and they received help from the NGO that connected the researcher to the family to continue going to school. They continue to receive help from this NGO with food and other basic needs.

Mandla also mentions his extended family from his “bigger” home or home of origin in Eqweqweni whom he sees when they do family rituals but he has no involvement with them other than that.

He talks about having good relationships with his neighbours, who he says sometimes help if they hear he is in need. Mndeni says that they help them when they are sick. Someone that appears in the adult support network for the first time in one of these diagrams is the local ‘nduna’ (a traditional leader in the community), who Mandla says they are able to contact if they have a problem. This is most likely unique to a rural setting such as this one. Mandla also talks about being involved in community activities such as soccer and attending community meetings. His account gives the impression that there is a strong sense of community in his area.

4.9 Adult support figures

4.9.1 Extended family networks

Desmond et al (2003) observe that the absence of an adult head does not mean that there is no adult supervision and support. They cite as an example Foster et al’s (1997) Zimbabwean study which demonstrated that many child-headed households were still connected somehow with extended family and received support in this way. This study similarly found intact extended family networks that offer various degrees of support to these child-headed households. In Mandla Ndebele’s case their step grandmother actually went to stay with them because, as he explains, they were “left alone as kids” (Ndebele, Mandla 1, L404-405). The fact that this is the simple reason he offers, without any further explanation, substantiates that it is largely unheard of for children to live on their own. He demonstrates his appreciation for his step grandmother when he says:

“She is like a mother and a father. That’s the role that she plays.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L936)

Mandla’s younger brother, Mndeni, explains the circumstances around which the step grandmother came to stay as follows:

“My dad [uncle] actually spoke to her and told her we stay alone and it’s not right that we do”

(Ndebele, Mndeni 2, L571-572)

The Ndebeles also speak about their relationship with their grandfather (their grandfather’s young brother or ‚small grandfather’ as their grandfather is deceased) being important in their lives. He is the person that they go and speak to when they have problems.

In the Hlanganani family from Cato Manor there is an aunt living opposite them that keeps an eye on them. They also have family from the Eastern Cape that they are in contact with although they do not visit often “because money is scarce” (Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L355), they do talk to them on the phone. Bongani’s sister, Thandiwe, related that they receive support, in particular, from an aunt who regularly sends them money.

“...there is a sister across the road who checks up on us....She is our aunt”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L157; L163)

“...on the farms there are people who help us as well....people who are related to my mom and dad...”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L523-524; L530)

“It’s our aunty from Ixopo who always buys clothes for us on Christmas, she is my mother’s sister....we only see her in December but we always call her and she calls us on the neighbour’s phone as well.... The money for the taxi that I take when I go to school, my aunt, the one from Ixopo, pays for it. She also paid school fees for us.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L149-150; L170-171; L391-392)

Sipho Mabuza and Bheka Nkosi both emphasise the importance of having extended family from their own perspectives. Sipho says that when he has his own children he will make sure that they know their relatives so that they do not end up alone should

anything happen. Bheka talks about how his aunt stepped in to take care of them and that they would not have survived without her.

“The hardship I have carried when I have my own home I would make sure that the kids know their relatives so that if anything happens they don’t stay alone, and if I’m there I don’t want them to live the same life I have lived of staying alone...”

(Mabuza, Siphosiso 2, L1230-1233).

“The people who are important in my life are my aunt, the one I stay with, and my siblings... Those are the important people in my life right now because when I come back from school even if I don’t know and I’m not sure what I am going to eat I always have hope that she [his aunt] will satisfy all my needs.... we argue with each other at times but we sit down and sort it out... I always think if she died my life would be over because there is no other person I can go to.... The role that she plays in my life is I can eat because she is there and I have clothes to wear, if she has money she tries for me to get some clothes.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L230-234; Bheka 2, L1407-1409; L1417-1418)

In Thulisile Mabuza’s extract she makes reference to the aunt that has been appointed from the extended family to keep an eye on her and her siblings.

“When I have a problem I normally talk about it at church or to my uncle’s wife who doesn’t live with us, who was told to keep an eye on us.”

(Mabuza, Thulisile, L123-125)

The following extract from one of Nosipho Dlamini’s interviews demonstrates a case where the extended family is already stretched and unable to offer much help. The grandmother is already looking after other grandchildren with her pension money, probably younger children or children that were not left with their own home by their parent(s). In the context of the orphan crisis in South Africa, there are many examples of family structures that have been stretched to breaking point due to government assuming that extended families will absorb the increasing number of children orphaned by AIDS (Walker et al, 2004). Nosipho’s cousin, Zama, indicates that they are not completely alone with no adult back up when she suggests in the extract

immediately below that they can call on the grandmother from uMlazi should they really need an adult.

“Aunty is always complaining that she doesn’t have money so there is no role she plays in my life. The one from Eastern Cape is too far and she has other grandchildren that she takes care of with her pension money. The one from uMlazi, when I ask for money, the one from uMlazi does give me.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L491-494)

“...when I have a serious problem that I cannot handle, that I can’t even share with Nosipho or even if I tell her she doesn’t know what to do, I phone her and tell her that I have a problem and can she help me in a way that she can help me. Maybe she would tell me I should do this and that. Even at school if there is something we have done they call her to come there.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L359-363)

The Hlanganani family receives support from a family aunt who lives far away in Ixopo. She regularly sends them money for school fees and transport. Mbali’s grandmother is also involved in her life from a remote distance. She gives advice and offers support, even having taken the younger children to live with her while Mbali was writing school exams. Mbali indicates her dependence on her when she says:

“She [her grandmother] is like a parent to me now, that’s how I think, there is no other person that we have hope in and she also has hope in us as well.”

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L957-958)

Mbali’s grandmother, who is also already supporting several of her other grandchildren where she lives in Maphumulo, illustrates another example of one of the many grandmothers left with the burden of solely caring for their grandchildren. It is recognised in much of the literature on orphans of AIDS (e.g. Desmond et al, 2003; Francis-Chizororo, 2007; Walker et al, 2004) that the crisis has resulted in a new role for grandmothers who are often left as the sole carers and providers for the next generation of children well into their aging years.

4.9.2 Community neighbours

Although much of what emerged from the interviews about relationships with neighbours in the community focused on the material help provided by significant adults and these relationships were defined less in terms of emotional support than as a function of what they could provide, there are some examples to suggest that more meaningful relationships did exist. The preoccupation with the provision of basic needs is to be expected in the context of extreme poverty where the emphasis is on daily survival and in particular, when children's status as children renders them powerless in many ways and interferes with their ability to take care of their families. It is also recognised that this aspect of their stories may have been emphasised for our benefit as potential providers of some form of relief. The extracts below demonstrate how neighbours and communities are supportive in various ways:

“The teacher from school I can tell him if I have a problem and he gives me money to go buy food at school and he asks me if I had food in the morning. The guy from next door when I go past his house on my way to school he gives me money and he also helps me find jobs.”

(Mabuza, Siphon 2, L903-906)

“Right now the help that we get is from the neighbours because they know the situation, they normally ask if we have eaten anything then we explain how we are to them. They always check up on us and the status of our problems because they know the whole situation.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L253-256)

“The neighbours are part of my life, they are like my family now....In my life I can say the neighbours that I have now, I see them as my parents because they are the ones who help me sometimes, in my life they play a major role.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1444; L1452-1453)

When asked about important people in his life Mandla Ndebele cites his neighbours as people in his support network and his brother, Mndeni, expands on this by explaining

that they go to the neighbours when they have problems “like when we are sick” (Ndebele, Mndeni 1, L146) and the neighbours take care of them.

“I can say it’s my neighbours, who sometimes come and help if they hear I am in need and perhaps get us help.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, 217-218)

Bongani Hlanganani relates how his world has been expanded to include people on the ‘outside’ taking care of him. It has taught him that it is important to be there for other people even if they are not on the ‘inside’, or not family, because other people have helped him.

“When I have grown being in my situation has taught me to take care of other people who are in trouble just like you cause you know how it feels to be there.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1730-1731)

Nosipho Dlamini, on the other hand, says that their neighbours are no longer able to help them which can be linked to Walker et al’s (2004) point that families in these communities are already stretched to breaking point. Everyone in the community is struggling and as the Dlamini family does not have the means to give back, the neighbours are reluctant to help them:

“They [the neighbours] do not help anymore. They say food is expensive and money is not easy for me to get it because they say how am I going to pay it back”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L458-459)

4.9.3 Social or institutional forms of support

A form of support other than from family or neighbourhood networks that emerged in this study is that of agencies such as charities, churches, traditional leaders and government. These institutions appear to filter in to fill in some of the gaps left by families and communities that are already overburdened. In Bheka Nkosi’s extract below he exhibits his dependence on the care worker that connected him to the NGO

that helps his family with basic needs such as food and clothes. The Ndebeles also obtained help from an NGO to continue going to school.

“I was very hurt. At times it comes back to me and I think this is how my mother died....I was able to see that there was nothing I could do, there was no one to cry to because I didn't know anyone who could help me until I met that sister who connected me to you [NGO representative] then I got help.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L895-896; L904-906)

“Ok if I remember when I grew up I stayed with my mom's side of the family then when my mom passed away we had to live with my uncle, we used to even go to bed without food, up until we moved to stay here. We came here after both our parents passed away, and stayed alone, even going to school was difficult and we got help to continue at school from here [meaning the NGO that introduced the interviewer and interviewee].”

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, L198 – 202)

The Hlanganani family is also supported by a community careworker that distributes some of the donations of food and clothes that come into the community from various NGOs.

“...there is one who visits us, her name is sister Zama [voluntary careworker who represents various NGOs in the community]. She normally helps us...She helps us with food.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L204; L210)

“We get in contact with Zama [voluntary careworker who represents various NGO's in the community] and then she gets us help from other people.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L581)

“This aunty who was here now [voluntary careworker who represents various NGO's in the community] is the one who checks up on us, she gives us food.... She also fetches some food parcels for us from the clinic.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L37-38; L571-572)

Bongani Hlanganani expresses that the people who are important to him, that he describes as having a close relationship with, are those that listen to their needs. This is an important expression of a deep need and desire by those that are voiceless and powerless to be heard and listened to.

“It’s those people [the people who are important to him] who come and ask what our needs are and come and help and check how we are in life....Like people who are connected with sister Zama [voluntary careworker who represents various NGO’s in the community] and ask how we are, are we ok, things like that.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1498-1499; L1513-1514)

It highlights the peculiarity of the situation that this was Bongani’s response given the wording of the question (i.e. important people in his life, people that are close to him). This indicates that in the context of these families in the dearth of close family relationships and friendships, outside agencies, through community representatives, become an integral part of the families’ functioning and support structures.

The Hlanganani family also gets food from their school. At his school, Bongani says:

“Food is given to people who are needy...”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L262)

In her interviews, Thulisile Mabuza talks about going to her church with her problems and Mndeni Ndebele speaks of his family’s religious beliefs as having been passed down and taught to them by their parents and bringing them comfort and solace when they are having problems.

In the rural village of Umlalazi near Eshowe, a context specific sort of community support emerged in the interviews in the form of the Nduna (a traditional leader in the community). The Nduna, a traditional leadership role that now often also forms part

of the local government structure in rural communities, was cited by Mandla Ndebele as someone in their community to approach with any problems.

There is also help provided by government or social welfare in the form of grants and housing subsidies. Although the government has been criticised for relinquishing their responsibility to some extent by promoting 'care in the community', a term used by Burman (1994) in the UK context, for orphans, thereby relying on unpaid care by women and children in the community, there has been a focus in recent years on addressing the specific needs of child-headed families. One example of this is the law change that allowed for under-age youth to access to child-support grants (Walker et al, 2004). Prior to this, minors according to the law were not allowed to collect the grant. When asked what problems she faces in her life and how she resolves them, Zama's answer indicates that they are obtaining assistance from social welfare. Nosipho reveals the importance of the contribution made by the social worker in her life when she expresses her desire to be a social worker and to also help people who are suffering.

"It's worse when we don't have food, that is our main problem, we try to get hold of the social worker and they help us..."

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L218-219)

"I want to be a social worker....It is because I like to talk to people especially, and there are so many people who are suffering, and I have learnt it from myself and I see it is important."

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L222; L230-231)

4.9.4 The gender dimension in family and support structures

On the whole, adult male figures were more prominent in the lives of young people in the rural village than in the urban setting. For example, there are a number of significant adult males in Siphso Mabuza's life. In his extended family there are his uncle and grandfather and there is also a male teacher from his school who he says he can talk to and that helps him with food. There is also a neighbour that takes him

along with him in the school holidays to do „piece jobs’ and earn some income. In Mandla Ndebele’s support network is the Nduna that he can contact if they have a problem. He also cites his „grandfather’ (or grandfather’s younger brother) as someone that he discusses his concerns with.

In the urban Cato Manor families, positive adult male role models were more noticeably absent in the talk as reliable and supportive figures. As my sample size is very small, these results are not generalisable in any way, however, these findings make sense in the context of the body of research (e.g. Mkhize, 2006) that attributes the decline of the involvement of men and fathers in family life, in this type of Southern African context, to social phenomena such as poverty, migrant labour and urbanisation. In a community such as Cato Manor where people have moved away from their families of origin to the city in search of work, it is expected that the corrosion of family life would be even more apparent and that the problem of absent fathers and positive male role models even more exaggerated.

An example from the findings in respect of absent or unreliable adult male figures is the Dlamini family story in which girls or women are presented as the ones that hold the family together in contrast to boys or men who are unreliable, undependable or simply not there. The Dlamini family is, in effect, a matrilineal family and women can be seen to hold this family together through the generations. In the following extracts, Nosipho and Zinhle Dlamini describe how their mother and her sisters pulled together and looked after their families without their fathers who had nothing to do with them. It is now Nosipho, together with her sister, Zinhle and female cousin, Zama who are the ones that are currently holding their family together, despite the fact that there are also boys in the family. As indicated in the family diagram and description, one of Nosipho’s male cousins moved out to live with a friend, one is in jail and the one that lives with them has very little involvement in their lives.

“Sifiso and them had their own mother and they stayed at the farms. Their mom was unemployed, my mom worked and when she got paid their mom would come and get money to buy them food and pay for their school. Their mother passed away so they came and stayed with us. Our younger aunt stayed in flats and she didn’t have time for kids. When she was sick as well she lost her job and she came to stay with us as

well. She passed away when we were still staying at those flats. So they stayed with us in my mom's house until we came to stay here when my mom didn't have money to pay anymore."

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L181-188)

It was strikingly apparent in the accounts of the young people interviewed that fathers were glaringly absent from their childhoods. Even when the young people speak about the loss of their "parent(s)" it is generally their mothers they are referring to whose deaths seem to have had the most impact. Fathers are significantly absent from their lives and childhood memories even if they were or are still alive. Mbali Luthuli and Zama Dlamini say they never knew their fathers; Zinhle Dlamini says that her father never supported her and she does not expect anything from him, Bheka Nkosi explains that his father was not around most of the time and Thandiwe Hlanganani talks about her father not being there when they needed him:

"My dad, I do not know him and I have grown up without knowing him"

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L340)

"Our mothers are not there anymore and we don't know our dads, we stay alone, we are used to it by now. At the beginning it was difficult when we were not used to it....My mom passed away and my mothers [aunts] until all of them were gone, then we were left alone, we don't know our fathers. Nosipho only found hers recently....The person that used to be important was my mom and her sisters at that time, I don't really care about my dad because I do not know him anyway..."

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L47-49; Dlamini, Zama 2, L106-107; Dlamini, Zama 1, L160-161).

"...we don't talk to each other. He is a womaniser and so I don't expect anything from him because he doesn't help me with anything and he doesn't phone me and I don't phone him. I don't ask for anything from him.... Even when my mom was still alive he didn't support me, even now, there is no difference"

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L531-533; L543-544)

"Yeah it's my Dad who never stayed with us most of the time."

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L90)

“It was very sad when she died. We were crying. We didn’t even know where we were going to stay and Dad didn’t take care of us. At some point he was staying with another women cause he separated with my mom...”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L199-202)

In the South African media men are generally portrayed as being neglectful and uncaring, often abusive. This negative image permeates everyday South African talk thereby promoting and sustaining this particular conception of men and of fathers. Hunter (2006), for example points to a prominent media stereotype that African men impregnate women and then abandon them. It is therefore not surprising that this theme emerged in the young people’s stories. Mkhize (2006) theorises that in underprivileged communities, structural barriers such as poverty, oppression and migrant labour are largely to blame for undermining fathers’ involvement in the care and upbringing of their children. And the latest in this list of calamities is the impact of HIV/AIDS.

This idea of fathers as absent perpetuates and is passed down to the next generation as young men are reluctant to become involved in the lives of their own children and young women do not expect it of them. An example from this study presents itself in a response from Nosipho Dlamini to a question about how it is different being a girl from a child-headed family as opposed to being a boy. In the first extract below, Nosipho explains that it would not be any different because a boy from a child-headed family could, like herself, also end up having a child of his own prematurely. Here, she appears to be referring to the stereotypical view that young people in homes without parents are more likely to engage in „irresponsible’ behaviour, and that both boys and girls are susceptible to this.

“...it’s not different because a guy could maybe, you know, like me, I was able to have a child still a child myself staying alone...”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L801-802)

In the next extract from Nosipho's prior interview, she tells how the father of her own baby is not involved and that he does not provide any form of help. It is clear that she does not consciously take into account the fact that her baby's father's life is unaffected by the presence of the baby. It is as if his uninvolvedness is expected and quite normal.

"The father of my child is not supportive. By the way I have applied for a grant and it is that which is going to help me."

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L376-377)

When Mbali was asked how it is different being a girl from a child-headed family as opposed to being a boy, her answer implies that the girls are the ones tied down with the responsibility of caring for the family, of holding the family together. It seems that in this extract Mbali is reproducing the dominant idea in her community that boys or men are free from the responsibility of caring for families, that they only have themselves to think about.

"It's different because a boy could just go"

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L1385)

The community care-workers that connected us to the young interviewees in Cato Manor related that the stereotypical scenario in this community is that the older girls who have lost their parents typically stay on in their family home and care for younger siblings while older boys "run off and do their own thing". This idea is reflected in the explanation Thandiwe Hlanganani gives for being the one out of her and her older brother that was selected to co-register for her mother's RDP house when it became available. She says that her mother applied for an RDP house but when it came time to register for the house after her mother had died it was registered in an older male cousin's name as well as her's. When asked why it was not registered in the name of her older brother, Bongani, Thandiwe responded that:

"They said it's because I am a girl. I don't know why but that was done by my Mom and Mthuthu [older male cousin]."

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L1278-L1279)

This is possibly related to the common assumption expressed in this community that girls are more likely to take responsibility and care for their families of origin. Having discussed the dominant discourse of boys and men as uncaring and uninvolved in family life that permeates through these communities, Bheka's account offers an alternative story, one that resists these stereotypes. Between the first interview with Bheka and the second, his younger sisters had been taken away to live with a family aunt due to the scarcity of resources in Bheka's home. The extracts below demonstrate how he loves and cares for his family, not insignificantly, a family in which there was no older girl child to step in as the maternal figure when his mother passed away:

“If I could, as you know I don't stay with my siblings anymore, I would be happy to live with them again or if they could come and visit on Fridays or Saturdays because it breaks my heart when I don't see them....I am not happy about this [not living with the younger sisters anymore] because I don't know what they are doing there, if they are treated right because it was better when they were next to me because I was able to wash their uniforms and feed them if there is food. Where they are I don't know if they have eaten or not, I'm not sure if they have eaten or not.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1069-1071; L737-740)

Bheka Nkosi's story suggests that gendered identities are not fixed but are continually developing according to the different ways in which individuals „construct' or perceive themselves in relation to others, and whether they are complicit with or resistant to cultural norms and expectations. Because gendered identities are negotiated according to the social constructionist position, girls and boys are seen as actively producing and negotiating their roles and functions within the household or family, whether they are conscious of this or not. It is possible that Bheka is able to resist the gender norms in this way because he is still very young and possibly not as strongly influenced by peer pressure as he may be in later adolescent years when identification with peers becomes very important. In the absence of any strong adult male role models it may become very difficult to resist these norms.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF CHILD/ADULT, ADULT/CHILD STATUS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 presents an analysis and discussion of themes around the contradiction of the young people in the study assuming adult responsibilities in the absence of adult status and the resources that are more readily available to adults. Perhaps their sense of being alone explored in the previous chapter is linked to a feeling of powerlessness, helplessness and dependence that comes with attempting to negotiate their way in an adult world without the status and authority associated with adulthood. Under the umbrella theme of Child Adults, or children behaving as adults, the following sub-themes are explored:

First the idea of the burden of “being responsible” is discussed and then further explored in terms of how this may or may not have changed before and after the death of the adolescents’ parent(s). Poverty as a hardship and a large scale problem within the adolescents’ communities is also discussed as a sub theme. The reality of these young people’s lives in terms of the hardship they experience as a result of both premature adult responsibilities and poverty is examined in terms of how it challenges the popular conception of childhood as a carefree time, particularly in the case of girls. Next the role of the young heads of households is explored in detail, divided into the sub-categories of providers, custodians of family homes and childcare and the moral responsibility of parenting. Thereafter, how democratic decision making and collective responsibility emerged in these households that lack the obvious hierarchy of adult headed households is discussed as a new theme that emerged from the data.

The second part of Child/Adult, Adult/Child status explores the umbrella theme of Adult Children, or the inferior status accorded children or adolescents and their positioning as children despite the adult roles and functions they perform. The implications of this power differential in favour of adults is explored in terms of what it means for the young people interviewed in terms of their “voicelessness” and implications in respect of housing and finances. Under the sub theme of financial

implications, a new theme that emerged from these young people's accounts is discussed which emphasises education as a means to attaining financial autonomy and a means to provide adequately for their needs as well as the needs of their families. The vulnerability of these young people is then explored within the sub themes of exploitation, physical and sexual abuse. The next major theme investigates the ways in which adult figures in the lives of the interviewees respond to their vulnerable position by adopting a supportive and protective stance towards them. This comes through in a number of examples from the young people's accounts, however, the subsequent theme examines the way in which the interviewees experience a great deal of hostility and negative judgement from adults in their communities. Unexpectedly, this emerges as a far more dominant theme and one that is particularly gendered.

Gender is a pervasive theme that re-emerges throughout the data and across several of the major themes. It is therefore discussed within the context of each of these themes in terms of how it functions or operates.

5.2 CHILD ADULTS

This section explores how the adolescents adapt to adult roles, adopting "adult-like" behaviours and how they are more competent in adult space than adults give them credit for. The examples of the lives these young people lead, taking on the responsibility of caring for their families and their homes, joins the body of literature and research which challenges the conventional borders between childhood and adulthood and lends further support to the argument that these borders are more fluid (e.g. Walker et al, 2004) and context specific (Burman, 2004) than people generally acknowledge in their talk about and interactions with children.

5.2.1. Acting adults: Being responsible

Expanding on the idea of "staying alone", Zinhle explains that in the absence of an adult to take care of them, she and her young family members are responsible for themselves:

“...we stay alone, there is no adult, we are responsible for ourselves as children.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L31-32)

This idea of ‚being responsible’ contradicts the popular notion of childhood as a carefree time. Although it is common for children and adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds to share some of the work of ‚adults’ and work alongside them sharing domestic chores and care of younger children, even contributing to household income, (e.g. Jones, 1993; Ramphele, 2002; Reynolds, 1991; Richter et al, 2005), it is the idea of being responsible in the absence of an adult caregiver to guide them and protect them that emerges as the greatest hardship for these adolescents.

Mandla Ndebele exhibits the extent of the burden he feels in response to his additional adult responsibilities and Bongani Hlanganani attributes the obstacles and problems that he faces in his everyday life to the fact that there are no “old people” to take care of things:

“I feel strained sometimes because I am not supposed to be doing some of the stuff I do because I am still a child.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L618-619)

“You just think that if the old people were here you wouldn’t be doing such things but...what can you do, you’re forced because there is no other way...”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L614-615)

5.2.1.1 Before and after the death of the parent(s)

The burden of absolute responsibility for the welfare of their family is contrasted with the feelings of greater security and happiness they describe when talking about their lives before the death of their parent(s).

Thandiwe Hlanganani commented that not much has changed in terms of the domestic tasks she did before her mother passed away and that even though it was better when

her parents were alive there were still hardships. She talks about how their mother was always sick and how she and her brother, Bongani, had to take care of her. Sipho Mabuza similarly related in one of his interviews that they stayed at home and did household chores before his mother died too. The extract below from Sipho's interview also demonstrates that making ends meet was always a struggle:

"...even when my mom was alive I used to do the same things I am doing now, cooking and cleaning. I was doing it already..."

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L2054-L2056)

"It was nice when were staying with parents but mom was always sick. She had asthma. We took care of her Bongani and I."

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L198-199)

"If I go back to my life, now it is harder than it was in the beginning when my mother was still here, we used to get everything we wanted, there was nothing we were not getting, we never went to bed without food, even if she was not paid yet she taught us how to make mats, and beads, traditional clothes then sell them so that we were able to get food. I used to go and work in the suburbs during school holidays in order to be able to get food."

(Mabuza, Sipho 1, L186–191)

Mbali recounts that the difference between her, coming from a child-headed home, and children that have grown up with their parent(s) is in her "heart" and "thoughts". She says that nothing else is different. This can be interpreted to imply that, practically speaking, given the community she lives in, there is not much difference in terms of the daily struggle with poverty and lack of access to opportunities. However, the fact that she has had to assume responsibility for her family at a young age defines her in a sense and it is something that she cannot escape from:

Interviewer: *"When you say there will be that thing that you grew up without your parents what is it that is going to be different, because you said there is that thing that the other child [child who grew up with parents] won't have?"*

Mbali: *I can say one thing that would be different is my heart and my thoughts.*

Interviewer: *When you say just your thoughts and your heart what do you mean by that?*

Mbali: *I mean always saying I don't have a parent.*

Interviewer: *How will it affect you when you become an adult?*

Mbali: *It's something that I can't do anything about."*

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L1195-1197; L1201; L1211; L1214; L1223; L1226)

Although there is this acknowledgement by the adolescents that life is not necessarily easier for children with parents in all circumstances, there is a pattern that emerges in their talk of romanticising their lives when their parent(s) were still alive, and a tone of nostalgia that is clearly evident in recounting their memories. Mndeni Ndebele talks about when his mother was there to look after him when he was sick and Bheka Nkosi and Sipho Mabuza both describe themselves as being happy when their mothers were still with them:

"It was better when my mom was still here because she used to help us when we were sick. When we stay alone we don't get help."

(Ndebele, Mndeni 2, L798-799)

"It's very different from before because before I knew that when I came back from school I'd have to do my homework and not think about a lot of things, it was nice just sitting and talking with my family. I was happy. Sometimes I think about it and how we would still be happy if they were all here."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1152-1155)

"It's very different because before we never went to bed without eating, we were always happy because mom was there, we knew if there was something missing we would ask her for it and we were able to talk to her as well but now there isn't a person that I talk to if something is missing."

(Mabuza, Sipho 2, L414-417)

Zinhle Dlamini talks about happier times when her mother and her aunts were still alive; the whole family would come together and they would have parties:

“Ee a long time ago when we stayed at the farms my mom and my aunties used to come home from here in Durban, they threw parties, the whole family came over. Even here at Christmas time the whole family came together but now nothing like that happens anymore.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L122-125)

When asked what things she remembers that bring her happiness, Mbali Luthuli answers: *“When I was a child and playing”* (Luthuli, Mbali 1, L382). She goes on to say: *“We used to play and talk in my home, but now...”* and she trails off.

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L386)

Zinhle Dlamini also talks about all her needs being fulfilled when her mother was still there:

“My name is Zinhle. From a long time ago my life was all right when my parents were still here but now things are difficult cause before I used to get everything that I wanted but now I don’t get everything I want. If I need something it’s not easy to ask from my mom like it was before. She used to give me everything but now there is no-one to turn to when I am in need.” (Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L43-47)

And Zama Dlamini draws a stark contrast between their current position of neediness and the freedom from these worries when their mothers were taking care of them:

“We run out of food and it’s hard to get food, sometimes we go to school on empty stomachs and come back without eating and not even the following day. We walk from school to home and we get home at about 5, then we have to wash our shirts and there is no food. We sleep again on empty stomachs and wake up in the morning again.”

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L261-265).

“It was all right when the parents were still here because they were working. There were no problems. They did everything for us when they were still here, everything changed when they were gone.”

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L63-65)

5.2.2 Poverty

There is an acknowledgement by these adolescents that having parents or adult caregivers in the home does not mean that life is less of a struggle in all circumstances. When asked if she thinks there are more challenges for her, being from a child headed family, than for children who stay with their parents, Nosipho, Zinhle and Zama's perspectives are that children from their community with parent(s) also struggle:

"Sometimes it's not different cause one can have their own mother and father but be the same as us..."

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L740-741)

"No there aren't more problems because maybe there are more problems for them than there are for me." (Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L746-747)

"Sometimes it happens that you have parents but then it's useless because when you ask for school things you don't get them just like us then there is no difference, you find that they do have parents but they are unemployed, they don't have food just like me when we don't have food at home."

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L596-599)

Zama implies that she feels their suffering is not unusual, or unique to them:

"I think it changes as you grow older, you get used to it and you see that you are like everyone else because this happens to anyone. I always say those who still have parents they are still going to face a difficulty of losing their parents, it's still going to hurt them."

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L515-518)

Because poverty is pervasive in their community there is a suggestion that this hardship overshadows any other difficulties associated with being from a child-headed family. This suggests it is impossible to tease out one traumatic life event, causing an interruption in a life narrative and the reconstruction of a life story, against a backdrop of constant struggle (Wilbraham, personal communication, July 31, 2009).

5.2.3 The myth of carefree childhood

What comes through in the above talk is a sense of loss and mourning for the more carefree and child-like (according to popular understanding) experience of childhood they remember when the responsibility for their wellbeing lay with their parent(s). Although when looking at each participant's story as a whole one has the sense that their lives have always been characterised by hardship, they themselves conceptualise childhood when their parents were alive as a time of freedom from the burden of responsibility. As emphasised in Walker et al (2004), children left with the full responsibility of their family's survival from a young age do not have the luxury of experiencing carefree childhoods. Although these adolescents' lives have never been free from work in some form, usually household chores, the lighter and more carefree sense that comes through when recounting their earlier childhood memories suggests that it is the burden of the primary responsibility for their families' welfares that weighs most heavy on their shoulders and goes against their own ideas about what childhood should be like.

It comes through in the references made to "child-like" activities such as playing soccer, going to movies and parties and spending time with friends that these young people characterise childhood as carefree, although essentially what they are saying is that they do not have time for play. In the following extract from one of Bheka's interviews there is a sense that he feels he is missing out when he talks about going home to check on the family and take care of household things while his friends go off to play:

"...even when I am at school I always think I'm still going home and I have to do that and that and see other kids going to play and I have to go and see if everything is

going well with my family and take care of the house.... if my aunty is there and she didn't go anywhere then I get a chance [to play]. I see that if they [his parents] were still here I would still be a child not an adult."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1260-1264)

It is as if these young people have been fast-tracked to adulthood as a result of their life circumstances. A quote from Bongani Hlanganani's second interview was very interesting in light of the idea of biological natural staged progression that underpins developmental theory. In this quote Bongani attributes, what he describes as his "mind" having "matured", to having been left with the responsibility of taking care of his family. In the context of popular ideas about childhood and youth this extract also affords the impression that Bongani is old before his time.

"Before my mind wasn't mature yet but now my mind is mature I can see how things are done better than before".

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L821-822)

5.2.4 Carefree childhoods are more of a myth for girls

For girls in particular the notion of carefree childhoods is more of a myth than a reality. In the literature it comes through very strongly that girls from disadvantaged communities in Southern Africa are more heavily burdened with domestic chores than boys and have less free time to play (e.g. Jones, 1993; Ramphele, 2002; Walker et al, 2004; Reynolds, 1991). What emerges from the accounts of the young people in this study is a reproduction of the cultural norms cited in previous literature claiming that girls carry the larger portion of the domestic work load. In an example of this from the Mabuza family, Siphso describes the division of household chores between himself and his sister along practical lines. She, however, tells a different story, suggesting that she works much harder and that the work is by no means shared out equally.

"Because I sleep in the other house and she sleeps in the other one I clean in mine and she cleans in the one she sleeps in"

(Mabuza, Siphso 2, L703-704)

“Sipho is always in his room when he comes home from school he eats, and spends most of the time in his room, he does fetch water but the water he fetches is for him to use for himself”

(Mabuza, Thulisile, L76-78)

Extracts from Thandiwe Hlanganani’s interview tell a similar story. A sense of her life, characterised by the chores she has to fit in around her school day and the lack of free time for herself, is captured in her description of a day in her life.

“I wake up in the morning and iron then take a bath, take Anele [her younger brother] to the aunty who takes care of him then go and take transport to school. When I come back just like right now I get home and cook then clean the house. In the morning first I make my bed then bath then iron again when I come back I cook then clean the house.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L365-369)

The mundanity of her daily routine outlined above draws a sharp contrast to her perception of what her older brother does. According to her, along with the other boys from the area, he has ample free time for himself. She is, nevertheless, resigned to her fate and clearly indicates that she feels powerless to change the way things are.

“He likes playing with his friends by the road. He is always with other boys. He doesn’t want to clean or do anything else. He does his own washing that’s all.... Yeah even if you ask him it’s the same, he doesn’t care. He won’t clean, even when I ask him. He just goes he doesn’t care. Even when I say I’m not going to dish up for you, when he comes back I dish up for him anyway. I don’t care. I always speak to him. I’m tired now.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L389-390; L414-417)

“It’s because I am a girl and I know I have to clean and cook.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L1585)

Although it may be the cultural norm that girls are more burdened with household chores than boys and this is therefore the internalised expectation of both boys and girls, there does not appear to be a conscious recognition of this, by the boys in the families anyway. When asked how he thinks it would be different being a girl in a child-headed family Siphon Mabuza replied that there would be no difference. When asked why he said:

“...because sometimes I cook for myself....I also scrub the floor when she is gone with the people from church.”

(Mabuza, Siphon 2, L1366; L1372).

In the examples of the Dlamini and Luthuli families the case can be made that the girls carry most of the burden of the household chores by positioning what they do next to what the boys do not do according to their accounts. When asked what each person's chores are in the house, including the little boys and her older male cousin, Mbali responds:

“Everything is my job.”

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L567)

“Let me see Sifiso is always sitting around at home there is nothing that he does he is always relaxing, when we come back we divide the tasks that we have to do. Siphile is always at work if he does have one at the timeat the moment we have to get water we come back from school and we have to get water , wash dishes and cook.”

(Dlamini, Nosiphon, L354-358)

“Sifiso doesn't do anything, he sits around and goes to church”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L248).

Although Nosiphon and Zinhle's accounts agree on the subject of Sifiso “doing nothing around the house”, their cousin, Zama, contradicts what they have said. When asked who does the work, she responds:

“All of us, all of them, including Sifiso.”

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L348)

It would be hazardous a guess to try to explain this contradiction, however, one possibility is that Zama may be protecting Sifiso out of loyalty to him.

What also transpired is that gender stereotypes divide the nature of the duties taken on by boys and girls respectively. In other words, some tasks are assumed to be either boys' or girls' tasks as a product of cultural and societal norms. It is interesting to see from these young people's accounts how girls and boys slot into stereotypical roles thereby reproducing these norms. Work typically performed by the girls in their homes is cleaning, cooking and washing:

“I am the one who cleans, buys and cooks.”

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L579)

“At home I clean, cook, and wash clothes for the younger ones, I do not fetch water they do, when I come home from school I cook, clean and I wash blankets.”

(Mabuza, Thulisile, L67-69)

“To clean, cook, wash dishes and washing...”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L70)

When asked what their sisters do, Bongani Hlanganani and Mndeni Ndebele respond as follows:

“Oh she cleans, washes the pots, sweeps and scrubs the floor so that it can be clean, then cook when she has to cook”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1205-1206)

“She does the washing, washing dishes, cooking and fetching water.”

(Ndebele, Mndeni 1, L40-41)

Mndeni says, however, that, aside from his more stereotypically male job of looking after the family's cattle, a typical role for boys in traditional, rural African families, he also washes dishes and fetches water. What the boys report in general is that they are more involved in duties outside of the house (where their sisters have insinuated in their accounts that there is actually nothing much that they do!).

"We [he and his brother] take turns in taking care of the cattle, fetching water and washing dishes."

(Ndebele, Mndeni 2, L982)

"My job is to clean the yard..."

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1139)

When asked how he thinks it is different for a girl being from a child-headed home to a boy he even goes so far as to say:

"It's just that some of the things if I was a girl I wouldn't be able to do like cleaning the yard."

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1843-1844)

"The things that I do at home are I clean the yard, cut the grass and I have also got a small business, which is the one that helps us get food."

(Mabuza, Sipho 1, L54-56).

"On weekends, we have cattle so we take them out, they are the dangerous ones [that have to be watched], and in the afternoon we collect them and that's it."

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, L381-383)

Mndeni of the Ndebele family also says on days when he does not have to attend school:

"I cut back the yard and look after cattle, do my washing and go and play soccer"

(Ndebele, Mndeni 1, L235-236).

5.2.5 The job without the title: Heads of homes

According to the interviewees' understanding, the head of the home is the one tasked with taking responsibility for the other children in the home and attempting to meet their needs. When asked what it means when someone talks about the head of the family, Mandla Ndebele, Bheka Nkosi and Zinhle Dlamini respond along similar lines emphasising the idea that their role is to see to the needs of the family:

"They look to me, I have to see what I can do"

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L586-587)

"You can say they are the person who can stand for the family, who is able to see the needs of the family."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L879-880)

"That is a person that is responsible for us and takes care of us, that we go to when we need something."

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L102-103)

Age is an important factor here with the responsibility most often falling to the eldest child. When Zama talks about someone "above" them in the extract below, she is referring to the hierarchy of age. This is linked to the idea that children are unfinished adults (Archard, 2004) and mature in a linear fashion as they grow older therefore the closer they get to adulthood the more competent, able and responsible they are likely to be. Mbali attributes the fact that she was left in charge by her mother to being the older one and the most trusted.

"It means a person who is above us, when we have a problem we tell them that we have a certain problem."

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L31-32)

"A head of the family is a person who is in charge of, that takes care of most things.... Things like, you know, like I am taking care of the kids. It's like I am the

head of the family cause my mom used to be....I think it's because I was the older one and my mom trusted me out of all of us."

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L339; L346-347; L418)

When Bongani in the Hlanganani family was asked how the way in which he takes care of his family would change if his elder sister, who comes and goes from the household, were to stay with them permanently, he responds that it would take "a load off" him (Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1881) because she would be the one in charge of who does what. When asked if he thinks she would take charge because she is a girl he says: *"It's because she is slightly older."* (Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1927) again emphasising the role of age in terms of the leadership status.

In the families interviewed there were some exceptions to the age rule determining to whom the responsibility of household head fell and these discrepancies were gendered. In Mbali's household there is also an older male cousin who was already living with the family at the time of Mbali's mother's death as his own mother had passed away prior to this. When asked about what his role in the home is Mbali replies that his role is merely to protect them. In her opinion he has no other function, is no help to her and spends his time relaxing with his friends. In Nosipho's household there is also an older male cousin who lives with them permanently and two others that are associated with the household although it is clearly Nosipho that is considered to be the head of the household by her siblings and cousins that live with her. When asked how it came about that she became the one who looks after everyone despite the fact that she is not the oldest Nosipho goes through the list of her male cousins giving reasons for why each of them is not suitable. In these families the age criterion was overshadowed by the fact that the girl children in each family were perceived to be more responsible and reliable than the boys regardless of the fact that they were younger. This is related to the ideas that unfold throughout these accounts and that circulate in the stereotypical community talk about child-headed households, of girls generally being the ones that 'stay', that hold their families together and that care for younger siblings.

"I can say he [Bongani] is guarding us since he is a guy.... Bongani doesn't do anything, he wakes up and goes and chills around with his friends."

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L365; L599-600)

“It’s because Sifiso is old in age but he is just not right. He even steals stuff from the house to sell it. He steals stuff knowing that the situation is bad in the house. Philani is in jail, he was arrested because he was doing bad things. So now only Siphiwe is there. He helps us when he gets a job and that’s how it ended up being me.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L153-156)

In the rural families, in the context of more traditional family and community structures, the age and gender constructs interact in a different way. Heads of households are traditionally men and therefore this title falls to the eldest male in the family. A typical example of how this works is shown in the Ndebele family where, even though the step-grandmother is an adult figure connected with the household, she recognises and respects the eldest boy as the head of the home by title and inheritance and she consults with him on major decisions affecting the family. When asked whether his grandmother talks to him when there are decisions to be made by his family he says:

“Yes, we sit down and talk.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L958)

Interestingly there is a notable ambivalence around identifying with the role of the head of the household in some cases, which may be as a result of the reluctance to fulfill this function due to the enormity of the responsibility. Another possible explanation may be a lack of confidence, feeling that they do not have the necessary resources to take it on. In some cases participants were more easily able to define what the ‘head of the household’ means than identify who this actually was in their specific household. In the extract from Siphos account below the reluctance and uncertainty around filling the role of head of his household is evident from the way he starts out by saying:

“There is no one [who is the head of the family], I can say it’s me.”

(Mabuza, Siphos 2, L381)

In the example from the Dlamini family, Nosipho is clearly seen as the head of the family by her sibling and cousin (Zinhle reveals her dependence on her older sister in the extract below), and even acknowledges this in a quote from her interviews cited earlier, however, in the extract below she names her older male cousin, Siphiwe, as the person who takes charge in the house and she relates this to the fact that he buys food for them when he has a job. Siphiwe does not actually even live with them but it is possible that she names him the head of the household because he gives them money when he can and she sees him as a provider. As is explored in the following section the head of the home is often associated with being the provider and as unemployed, school-going youth they do not readily identify with this role.

“Nosipho is [the head of the family] as, well there is no other person that I think is important. When I need something she tries with the power that she has to provide. She tries to close the gap. When I’m older I would like to thank her any way I can. Even if she doesn’t have money she knows that she has a little sister that she has to give everything she needs so she is an important person to me.... sometimes I cry to my sister when I want something, you see.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L93-98; Zinhle 2, L343)

“What can I say, the person who is in charge in at home, who buys us food if he has managed to get a job, is Siphiwe”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L26-27)

5.2.5.1 Providers

As in the example of Nosipho Dlamini above, there is great emphasis placed on the provider aspect of the head of the household role that resonates through all of the interviews. Zinhle Dlamini’s response to the below question demonstrates this and the responsibility to provide clearly weighs heavily on Mbali Luthuli’s shoulders in the following extracts. Even if the head of the home has limited or no resources the responsibility for or burden of attempting to make a plan lies with them as seen also in Nosipho’s suggestion below that she has to find a way of providing what her family needs even if she does not have the means to do so herself.

Interviewer: *“And then is there anyone you can say is the head of the family?”*

Zinhle: *Like maybe who feeds us like that?”*

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L88; L91)

Interviewer: *“So what are the ways that you see yourself as an adult when you look at your life?”*

Mbali: *There are people that I feed now, I didn't know that before, I am the same as people who feed other people, I can see that I have grown....Even when I get money I can't use it for my needs, I have to think about what we are going to eat at home. Even the grant for my child, I don't use it for myself whereas before I used it to buy things for myself.... A person who stays with their parents, they get money from their parents to do whatever they want to do, for me when I get money I think about the needs at home.”*

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L628; L632-633; L491-493; L1302-1303)

“...when we don't have food we have to ask the social workers and also school stuff so we can go back to school. Since they are girls they ask for pads from me and I have to ask where I can in order for them to have them.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L253-255)

Traditionally the role of provider in the family is filled by a man. Being a provider is an important function in defining men and fathers in communities such as these (Mkhize, 2006) and in society more generally. Siphon Mabuza has adopted this common conception by taking on the responsibility of attempting to provide for his family by taking on jobs and running a tuck shop outside of school time, to bring in some income. It is evident in the following extracts that he has integrated the responsibility to provide for his family into his sense of identity as the man of the house in the absence of a father.

“...when school is closed I have to go and look for a job so that I can take care of the home.... I have also got a small business, which is the one that helps us get food.... I sell cold drinks, bread, beer, sweets, chocolates and snacks.... it has just opened, maybe 2 weeks ago.... I go to school when I come back I stay home and start selling

until late, the next day I do the same, then on weekends I spend the whole day selling until late with no interruptions....with the profit I have received, I split it so that with the other half I will be able to get cooking oil, rice and bread for the younger ones and then continue like that.”

(Mabuza, Siphos 2, L518-519; Siphos 1, L55-56; L61-62; L64-65; L405-407; L437-439)

As in the example of Nosipho Dlamini being prepared to ask for things for her sisters in the extract presented above and the explanation given by Zama Dlamini in the extract below, dependence and seeking help appears to be more socially acceptable for girls according to society's conditioning.

“Girls can understand their situation at home, they can go out there and ask other people for help like saying we have a problem at home, we haven't cooked, please give us mielie meal”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L642-644)

In the below extracts a number of the young people, both the boys and the girls express their desire to work and earn money to support their families. What is striking about these young people is the dedication and sense of responsibility that they have towards their families. Beyond carrying out the wishes of parents in some cases to stick together and stay on in the family home, their accounts tell the story of young people who, themselves, take the responsibility of caring for and providing for their family into the future very seriously. When asked what she would like to do when she finishes school, Mbali says:

“Yes I would like to study further but since the situation here in my home is like this bad I would like to get a job because we run short of food and sometimes sleep without eating.... I have been studying here at Mayville, and as I was saying I want to finish school and get a job, if I can get a job I will be working for my mom's children because there is nothing else I can do. My brother's [cousin] problem is an ID, he has tried several times to apply for it but failed to get it, and that is why he is not working”

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L254-255; L)

“I want to study until I’m finished so that I can get a great job to support my siblings [she is referring to her cousins] and also satisfy all my other needs.”

(Dlamini, Zama, L182-183)

“Things that I believe in, okay I believe that I need to study and finish school so that I will be able to get a job to support my mom’s children.”

(Mabuza, Thulisile, L259-261)

“Maybe when I finish school I wouldn’t be able to continue and I have to go and work so that my siblings can be able to continue and not be like me.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L1187-1188)

Mandla’ response is particularly interesting in terms of him having internalised the responsibility of parenting that was left to him. It is a common story, that of parents making sacrifices in order for their children to be better educated and attain a higher standard of living than they had. But for a sibling to put aside his own dreams of pursuing a better life for himself for the sake of his younger siblings is less often heard. In this way his freedom is curtailed long before he has thought about having his own children, by the enormous sense of responsibility for his siblings that he has taken on.

“If I would study further I would take care of them [my family] in the proper way.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L938)

He goes on to expand on this by citing the examples of buying uniforms, clothes and food and paying school fees. In other words, by this, he means providing for them.

5.2.5.2 Custodians of family homes

The head of the home is entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the family’s assets and safe guarding and looking after the family home they have inherited. When

asked what the head of the family means, Siphon Mabuza answers that this is usually an older person who owns the house. He therefore explains that by looking after the house he has taken on a role that would usually be filled by an adult. Mbali Luthuli claims that she cannot leave her mother's home to go and live with her grandmother on the farms because someone may take over their house. She stays on in the house with her siblings because she has been charged with the important responsibility of safe guarding her mother's asset:

"It's the older person and the owner of the house who takes care of the house.... I stay at home and do the jobs that old people do in their own houses....Like the one of fixing the fence and fixing things that are broken like the cupboard and doors and putting a fence around the garden."

(Mabuza, Siphon 2, L343; L775; L782-783)

"...we cannot just leave this house to live there at home [the farms] as I think maybe people might take our mom's house."

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L522-524)

The issue of having and holding on to their own homes emerged as an important priority in all of the families interviewed. According to Levine (cited in Foster et al, 1997), children may stay on in their home after their parent(s) have passed away because they have made promises to their dying mothers that they will stick together as a family and take care of the younger children. This can be seen in the case of Siphon Mabuza's family when Siphon relates how he was charged with the responsibility of holding on to their family home by his mother before she died:

"She said we shouldn't let anyone move us from her home, it is our house, she said even if there is something pushing us away. We have kept her word up until now the people have tried to move us but they have failed."

(Mabuza, Siphon 1, L191-194)

Siphon is one of the boys interviewed from the rural village of Umlalazi near Eshowe and in traditional African families the head of the home is typically a man. In Siphon's

family this gendered role is expressed in his ownership of the house now because he is the oldest **boy** in the family:

“It has changed me in a way that I see that I am the owner of the house because I’m the only old boy.”

(Mabuza, Siphon 2, L432-433)

5.2.5.3 Childcare and the moral responsibility of parenting

Childcare appears to fall predominantly within the realm of the eldest girl child’s responsibilities. Bheka Nkosi is an exception to this rule, caring for his younger siblings when they lived with him:

“...since I am the older one sometimes when I come back from school I have to clean and do washing for the younger one who can’t wash for herself...”

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L115-116)

However childcare was performed almost exclusively by girls in the family. This follows cultural and societal norms and was the case even when the eldest member of the household was male. For example, in the Mabuza and Hlanganani families, where the eldest and recognised head of the family was an older brother, the task of looking after younger siblings fell to the eldest girl child. Below are extracts from interviews with Mbali Luthuli, Thulisile Mabuza and Thandiwe Hlanganani, all of whom live with older male family members. It is particularly noteworthy that these young girls imply that the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings is a full time one with very little support.

“I do make it [food] for them [her younger brothers], and warm them bathing water, then they bath and dress and go.... If they have homework I help them.... Sometimes I ask my brother [cousin, to watch the younger children] but he is not very keen on doing it.”

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L614; L622; L711)

“I am always with them [the younger siblings], we even share the same room.”

(Mabuza, Thulisile, L158-159)

Thandiwe defines the responsibility of looking after her much younger brother as an adult responsibility when she answers a question about ways that she sees herself as an adult as follows:

“It’s that I check what’s not there and take care of Anele [her younger brother] ...”
(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L1633)

It is a common assumption in developmental psychology and in society’s thinking at large that families are the primary site for the socialisation of children. Families, especially mothers are viewed as reproducers of culture (Yuval-Davis & Anthias cited in Burman, 1994) and it is generally mothers in contemporary society who are tasked with socialising children. Traditionally in African cultures in South Africa fathers were, in fact, viewed as the custodians of moral authority within their families (Lesejane, 2006). However, according to Ramphele and Richter (2006) the disruption of families by colonisation and apartheid left its mark on children, one of the implications being that the esteemed position of fathers was compromised (Mkhize, 2006). According to Walker et al (2004), child or adolescent headed households have emerged as a direct impact of HIV/AIDS on the structure of families and households in South Africa and in the absence of parents, it is not unusual for adolescents to be charged with socialising younger children.

Taking on a mediator role between the wider world of adults and their younger cousin (in Zama Dlamini’s case) or sister (in Nosipho Dlamini’s case), the girls explain how they are the ones that have to get involved when Zinhle gets into trouble. Nosipho in fact cites this as one of the examples of ways in which she sees herself as an adult, clearly reflecting society’s perception that resolving disputes and bringing children into line is usually within the domain of adult behaviour:

“...when a person would have an argument with Zinhle and we are not there then Zinhle would come back and to tell us that so and so has done this to me then I have to go to that person and find out what is happening things like that....I go to them because Zinhle has come to me then I go to them to ask what’s happening.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L280-282; L289-290).

“...when I see something wrong I am able to tell them [sister Zinhle and cousins] that you are doing something wrong and they listen when I tell them. When there is something I see or a person from outside comes to report that Zinhle has done something they don't tell her, they come to me.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L406-409)

Bheka talks about how he ‚teaches‘ his younger sisters some of life’s lessons that appear to have been passed down to him by their mother and that he has absorbed at the tender age of fourteen. He focuses on the importance of education, staying together as a family and not growing up too fast. He does recognise his limited power to have an effect on their lives, however, when he says that, despite this guidance, they will decide on their own course and there is not much he can do about that.

“What I teach them is that we must study and be together as we are at the moment, as a family, and finish school and they will choose their own way when they are older. Also that they mustn't rush things, they must wait for the right time but when the time comes I cannot hold them back.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L402-405)

This idea resurrects the notion of age hierarchy especially when considered alongside the example of a family such as Bheka’s, where there are younger pre-adolescent children who do listen to their older siblings when they tell them what to do.

“Yes I had to tell my sisters what to do. The one in grade five I would tell her when we came back from school, I would tell her to wash the dishes and I will wash the uniforms and then the other one when we needed something from the shops and we had a little money then we would send her.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1224-1227)

In the Hlanganani family where there is a much younger brother, when asked if his little brother and sister listen to him when they are asked to do things, Bongani, the eldest boy, affirms that he does.

“They listen to me, there is nothing that I ask them to do that they don’t do.”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 1, L657)

Despite the examples above of how these young people have stepped up and adopted the role of parent in many ways, there is a suggestion by Zinhle in the below extract that an adult is needed at times to tell them what to do because young people do not have the same level of authority as ‚real’ parents or family elders and this can result in the older adolescents in the family not taking each other seriously:

“There must be an old person who can tell us what to do, perhaps things would be fine cause we take each other for granted.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L224-225)

5.2.6 Democratic decision making and collective responsibility

Although at first glance the idea of young people lacking the authority of parents or elders in the family gives the impression of something problematic, particularly in terms of Zinhle’s lament in the above section, it emerges that this scenario simultaneously opens the way for a form of democratic living that few adolescents living in homes headed by parents or family elders would have the opportunity of experiencing. This idea could also present a plausible explanation for the ambivalence, mentioned previously, on the part of some of the interviewees, about naming one particular person as the family head. It may well be that because there is no adult or elder who would be the obvious person to fulfill this position in the household there is greater democracy within the home. Much of the talk by the participants around daily chores and tasks alluded to them working together, taking turns and consulting and agreeing on who does what when. This is particularly evident in the Dlamini family where each of the three young girls interviewed responded similarly when asked what tasks they perform in the house:

“My job is to clean, we take turns with cleaning, there is a timetable for cleaning and cooking. Monday to Sunday we take turns with cleaning and cooking, also washing.... We all sit down and talk about it [who does what], maybe I say first what I’m going to do because I am the one who came up with the timetable idea for example I will say on Monday I am cleaning and washing dishes, then another one will say Tuesday and it goes on and on. There is no argument about it, nobody argues”

(Dlamini, Zama 1, L290-292; L332-335)

“We divide the tasks for each day for each person to do.... We all sit down and tell each other who is doing what. If the person refuses to do something that day then they choose a day when they are able to do it.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L347; L369-370)

“...we divide the cleaning and cooking amongst ourselves and say Monday perhaps who cleans and who cooks...”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L256-257)

When Mndeni from the Ndebele family is asked who decides who does what he responds in a similar light:

“We discuss it, if one is cooking the other one should go and fetch cattle”.

(Ndebele, Mndeni 2, L234-235)

He also displays remarkable insight and wisdom at his young age when asked what needs to be done for a family to be “ok”. Expecting the fairly standard response about basic needs his reply is both unexpected and surprising:

“To respect one another”

(Ndebele, Mndeni 2, L916)

Bongani Hlanganani and his sister, Thandiwe also seem to work to some form of timetable when it comes to cooking for the family and thereby also display turn-taking behaviour:

“Oh we sit and whoever sees something wrong corrects it”

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1175)

Interviewer: *“Is she [his sister] the only one who cooks?”*

Bongani: *“Yes both of us, I mean when it’s her day to cook then she cooks as well”*

Interviewer: *“So you have days?”*

Bongani: *“Yes....We discuss who is washing pots and who is washing uniforms on which day.”*

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1215; L1218; L1221; L1224; L1231)

However, unlike in the Dlamini family where there are no close relationships with adults living nearby, although Bongani indicates that he and his sister use their initiative in seeing what needs to be done and doing it, he contradicts himself when he says that his aunt (the one who stays across the road and who was charged by the extended family with keeping an eye on them) asks him to clean the yard and helps to determine who does what chores on what days.

Interviewer: *“Ok who says Bongani do this?”*

Bongani: *“No there is no one but aunty asks me to clean the yard”.*

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1154; L1157)

Interviewer: *“Ok do you both decide or is it you who says today you are doing this?”*

Bongani: *“It’s aunty who divided the days so that we could work equally”.*

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1244; L1247)

Maybe what he is saying is that he obeys his aunt as his elder but in actual fact he does not need anyone to tell him what needs to be done since he does go on to say that *“no-one is pointing out that this is what we must do most of the time.”* (Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1b905). It is interesting to note that Bongani uses the word “equally” when it comes to the dividing of tasks between him and his sister, and yet, in the literature and in what these girls, including his sister, report, the girls are far more involved in performing household chores and there is not very much around the house that the boys do!

Thulisile Mabuza from the village near Eshowe says that when her older sister from Durban is home she tells her what to do but in actual fact when she is not around Thulisile knows what she is supposed to do and likewise, Zama Dlamini sees herself as „adult-like’ in the way that she is no longer told what to do by someone else but that she knows herself what to do. Mandla Ndebele, from the same area as Thulisile, similarly says that all of them know what to do since they have lived on their own for a while.

“No one tells me, it’s normally my sister the one who is in Durban who tells me when she is around otherwise I know what I am supposed to do.”

(Mabuza, Thulisile, L88-90)

“...because as my mom passed away and all of them [her aunts] are not here I know what I have to do at a certain time, there is no one who tells me that now you have to do this, I can see that I have grown because of that.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L207-209).

“What can I say, I do tell them [what to do] but most of the things they know that they have to do by themselves, and mostly we just do things because we have been staying on our own for a while, so we know how to do our things.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, L122-124)

Bongani and his sister Thandiwe Hlanganani display a great deal of responsibility in the way that they cautiously handle the money sent to them by their aunt in the Eastern Cape to cover their school fees and transport.

“We call her [their aunt in Ixopo] and she gives the money to Ixopo taxies then we fetch it here in Durban”.

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L522-523)

The behaviour displayed in the above scenarios challenges the common assumption that children are incompetent when compared with adults and implies instead that children are more capable than adults give them credit for. Something else that transpired from these interviews is that the adolescents appear to act on their initiative

without having to be told what to do. This emerges as another behaviour that may not be as developed in adolescents or young people that live in the constant presence of an adult. This idea that young people having to work things out on their own may have a positive aspect may be related to Solberg's (cited in Hengst, 2001) assertion that the social age of children with more freedom and responsibility is advanced by negotiating their own use of domestic space when compared with children who are deprived of self-determination through being under constant surveillance by their parents. Bongani Hlanganani, for example, suggests that he feels that he is able to be self-motivated and self-disciplined when he says:

"It's different because there are no adults that are going to tell us what to do. We do things but we don't do wrong things."

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L834-835)

5.3 ADULT CHILDREN

This section examines the ways in which the adolescents in the study are still positioned as children even if they are performing an adult role or adult functions. The power differential between children and adults is marked in the recurring theme that children are inferior to adults and do not command the same respect in their communities as adults. The structural relationship of unequal power between adults and children (Hood-Williams, 2001) can be seen to expose these young people to various forms of exploitation by adults. Furthermore, in many instances, because they carry the burden of responsibility for their families without the resources that are more accessible to adults, they are a particularly vulnerable group. In the families interviewed, although the adolescent heads of households were eighteen and over in four out of the six families (included according to the criterion of still being in school), their experience of the perception of others was that they were seen as lacking adult authority and status.

5.3.1 "Children should be seen and not heard"

"I just go there to listen, because I shouldn't be there it's just because of the situation that there is nobody from my house, I go there just to listen, not to say anything."

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, L315-317)

As revealed in the above extract, the fact that Mandla Ndebele attends community meetings to represent his household, being the eldest member, but does not say anything, suggests that he feels unworthy of being heard because it is not his place to be there among the adults of his community. Although members of child-headed households have particular needs as a vulnerable group Mandla's silence in a forum that exists to address issues affecting members of the community means that the voices of these young people regarding their particular needs within their community are not heard. This is reminiscent of the Victorian ideal that children should be seen and not heard based on the idea that children should be kept quiet and under control thereby maintaining their powerless position within society.

It also means that this special needs population is excluded and side-lined. The fact that they do not have a voice in their communities is related to the fact that there is little in the field of research relating to this population in terms of the voices and representations of these young people themselves (e.g. Richter et al, 2005).

The young people's perception of being alone, that comes through as such a prominent theme across all of the interviews, is most likely linked to this feeling of not being heard or a sense of "voicelessness". Bongani Hlanganani, for example, expresses in the below extract in response to a question regarding who the significant people in his life are, how important it is to him for people to ask them how they are, to give them an opportunity to give voice to their experience and to be heard.

"It's those people who come and ask what our needs are and come and help and check how we are in life."

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1498-1499)

This silence or voicelessness also appears to be gendered in light of Zinhe's explanation that boys are less vulnerable than girls because they can **talk** for themselves:

“Girls are in danger more than boys cause anything can happen to them. It’s better being a boy cause they can talk for themselves and fight as well. A girl cannot talk for herself if a thug comes in...”

Additionally, the only example in the young people’s stories of an adult consulting with them on decisions involving their lives and family is the example in the Ndebele family of the step-grandmother sitting down with them to discuss such issues. It is not insignificant that the adolescent members of this household are boys and reside in a rural community where the status of men as heads of households is strongly upheld.

5.3.2 Financial implications

Although the importance of the provider role was a prominent theme in the talk about heads of families, as school-going youth, none of the interviewees were in a position to adequately fulfill this role. The sense of powerlessness of children relative to the options they perceive as available to adults came through particularly in Zinhle Dlamini’s claim that adults can work and earn money. According to South African law, children are employable from the minimum school leaving age of fifteen if they have reached the end of Grade 9 (Mahery & Proudlock, 2008) although of course such individuals are ill equipped to find work in the context of severely high levels of unemployment. Zinhle was sixteen at the time of being interviewed, but only in Grade 8. It is common for children in these situations, struggling with family difficulties and having to carry additional responsibilities at home, to leave school for extended periods of time thereby delaying their progression through the schooling system. There is an irony here in that although the purpose of schooling is to provide a means of attaining economic independence, many children whose schooling has been delayed and who may desperately need to earn an income to support themselves and their families may only reach the end of Grade 9 and become eligible for employment well after their eighteenth birthdays, thereby rendering them dependent beyond the age of majority or the cross over into adulthood as defined by the Law.

“For now there is nothing that I see that makes me see myself as an adult. Sometimes I wish I was older, it would be better cause I would be working. I say if I was older I

would be working and I would have money, you see, but for now that's the way it is..."

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L318-321).

On the subject of children and adolescents at a disadvantage in terms of access to money or the implications of not being a financially independent adult, in the following account Nosipho Dlamini describes how her age has placed her at a disadvantage and is standing in the way of accessing a pay-out from her mother's employer.

"My mom used to work as a cleaner for Fidelity Supercare for 35 years. She has a lot of money due to her that was never paid out. Now another aunty from the family came to us and she wanted to claim the money for us and when she realised it was a lot of money she spoke to the girl at the company. I don't know if they were planning to split the money amongst themselves because she refused to sign the form to get the money.....She heard that my mom was working there for 35 years and she is going to get a lot of money. Then she said I can't get that money because I am young so she wanted to claim it herself. She went and she told the girl where the money is claimed that I can't get the money because we are young and we stay alone and she said she was going to claim it herself and I refused. When I refused the girl said she will not let me sign the form because my aunt we call her aunt but....[she is] just a distance aunt, we call her aunt because we respect her. She said we are going to misuse the money, so they both [aunt and lady] refused to sign the form. When we were trying to get hold of her they kept on saying she is out of contact. Even when the social workers phoned they were also told that this lady was out of contact, so we are still waiting for her money"

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L126-130; L142-146; L153-157).

Note the 'respectful' term used even though they are suspicious that the aunt was going to do something not worthy of respect by exploiting them. This is linked to the notion that children are forced to respect adults through discipline and autocratic leadership. Adults do not necessarily have to earn respect, it is accorded to them for their age, simply being adults gives them the right to superior status in the eyes of many even if they do not behave respectably.

One possible interpretation is that these young people are being taken advantage of, maybe even exploited, by an adult relative due to their relative inexperience; or another is that the inheritance due to them is legally being withheld until they are older based on the popular belief that young people are, on the whole, not responsible enough to manage money or make decisions about how it is used. This is interesting in light of the fact that these young people's circumstances have forced them to be responsible and behave like adults in other ways. Furthermore, in terms of the latter interpretation, one may assume that this position would stem from the justification that it is in young people's best interests not to give them the responsibility of managing a lump sum of money as a means of protecting them. Children's rights activists claim that doing things in children's best interests implies that children are not the best judges of what is good for them but Boyden and Hudson (cited in Burman, 2008) argue that acting for children often denies them their agency, autonomy and participation in decision making. It may be argued for instance in this scenario that excluding the Dlamini family from the decision about their finances and leaving them destitute when there is money available that could assist them in their day-to-day struggle for survival while they are still at school and unable to support themselves is clearly not in their best interests.

In the Hlanganani family, comprising the male head of eighteen years; Bongani, his younger sister of fifteen years and a brother of five, the fifteen-year-old sister claims that they are unable to access the government Child Support Grant because there is no adult to apply on their behalf:

"There is no one to represent us to apply for the orphan grant."

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L39)

In actual fact the age at which a child can access a Child Support Grant in his or her own name for his or her own child or younger siblings is sixteen (Mahery & Proudlock, 2008). In this case it is therefore a perception of restrictions associated with young age or child status that has prevented this family from attempting to secure help in this form, but this also suggests that available help is not communicated

adequately to young people in this position. Instead they have to rely on representatives in the adult world to access „privileged’ information about their legal rights and the help and resources available to them. It is most likely for this reason that in Francis-Chizororo’ (2007) study it was found that child-headed households getting help from NGOs generally had an elderly person in the household who could represent them and help them access the services available in the community.

5.3.2.1 Value placed on education

A powerful theme that emerges is the great deal of emphasis and value placed on education as a means to becoming self-sufficient, independent and financially secure. Interestingly, according to Santrock (1995), in psychological thinking and theory there is no clear definition of where adolescence ends but a general understanding is that becoming autonomous from parents, particularly in terms of economic independence, is a key requirement. Although these young people do not have parents on whom to depend, it comes through very clearly that attaining financial independence and security is a major goal for them.

In this first extract from Nosipho’s interview the emphasis on education as a key to a better future appears to have been passed down from her mother. Bheka similarly reveals his thinking that finishing school will open doors for him, Zinhle dreams of reaching far off places and Mandla hopes to improve the situation in his home:

“My mom was just told me that education is important, but again I even know that myself because there is nothing you can do if you are not educated in our days. You be educated so that you will be able to get a good job that pays you money...”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L272-274)

“... I also believe that if I am educated I would be able to help my family out of the situation we are in, if I finish school then I can do all things I want to do.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L380-382)

“My plans are to finish school then study further like get out of this place that I stay in and go overseas and see the life outside here, also see how they live there. When I get there I want to have a lot of money and more money. And my dreams are to have a home where everything will be nice, to have a big house and have all the wonderful things...”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L145-149)

“I wish to finish school and continue further if possible, then build my home, our home, and live there nicely and have a good life.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, L231-233)

Linked to the idea that men usually fulfill the role of provider in families it is significant that none of the young girls mention getting married as a means to becoming financially secure. Only Thandiwe mentions getting married when she talks about her future, but it is not in this context that she talks about it. Instead, she also talks about working and being able to provide for her family herself.

When asked about her plans and dreams for the future Thandiwe answers:

“If I would work and buy a big house or build one and help Anele with his studies and stay in my own house and be ok, maybe get married I don’t know.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 1, L261-262)

In spite of the structural constraints that the young people in this study experience their sense of agency comes through powerfully when they talk about their plans and their dreams for the future. When asked if he sees anything getting in the way of him achieving his goals Bheka states:

“...I don’t see anything else that would stop me if I am determined, unless I am going to think about where I come from and my family and the kind of life that I lived, what kind of a home I came from, there is nothing that would stop me as long as I get good grades and finish school.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 1, L333-337)

Although he does see his background as a disadvantage, he is determined. For most, however, the opportunity to study further is beyond reach. Mandla acknowledges this when he says:

“I think perhaps money to continue studying can be a problem”

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L1159).

Although the value these young people place on education is a particularly predominant theme in their talk, for the majority their progression through the schooling system has suffered interruptions due to their life circumstances which dictate a considerable amount of other „work’ outside of school. Mndeni from the Ndebele family, for example, missed an entire year of school at around the time that his mother passed away. When asked about what things are important in her life, Nosipho’s reply acknowledges the fact that there have been delays in her schooling:

“It is to continue with my studies because I am left behind with my studies...”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L254)

It is interesting to consider here Hengst’s (2001) assertion that childhood was invented as a concept to free children from wage labour and provide them with play and learning experiences, but in the case of these adolescents they are tied up in a substantial amount of non-economic, domestic labour and for them school is a luxury that comes second to the survival needs of the family.

Despite their focus on attempting to gain a school education as a means to better their life situations, the harsh reality is that finishing school does not result in a guarantee of paid work. Taking into account the unemployment statistics in South Africa, for many this idea that a „matric’ can buy them a future is a false hope, with young people from underprivileged communities being at the biggest disadvantage.

5.3.3 Implications for housing and legal ownership

Linked to the theme that emerged involving the inheritance and safe-guarding of family property is the issue of RDP housing and how legal definitions of age are dealt with in terms of the policies surrounding housing subsidies. According to South African Law, the legal age at which a person can apply for a housing subsidy is eighteen, although, in a further attempt by the legislature to recognise the existence of and address the needs of child-headed households, a policy is currently being developed to enable child-headed households to become eligible for housing subsidies (Mahery & Proudlock, 2008). The Nkosi family is due a RDP house registered in their mother's name before she died. However, since Bheka is the eldest of his mother's children and below the legal age for signing and entering into a legal contract at age fourteen, his aunt will have to contract on behalf of the children. All of the paperwork will therefore be in the aunt's name and the house will effectively be hers.

"It was my mother's house she was the one who registered for the house because my grandfather gave it to her."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L299-300)

"When we get the house my aunty is going to take care of it because she is our relative and she is the one who is raising us and who is trying to make things work for us."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L307-309)

With housing child-headed homes are prioritised as a group being particularly vulnerable and having special needs. If too young to sign then a family adult or neighbour will sign for children – this person of authority is determined by the community and family network of adults. Children are not consulted on this, but rather decisions are made on the authority of 'responsible' adults. This is what happened in the case of another one of the families interviewed from Cato Manor – the Hlanganani family:

Bongani: *"...it was the number for us to get a house but now she [the aunt] owns it."*

Interviewer: *"Oh whose name was the house registered in?"*

Bongani: *“It was in [my] parent’s name but because they were not there anymore...”*
(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L221; L222; L224)

This leaves them vulnerable to potential exploitation by adult extended family members or community adults who may not necessarily have their best interests at heart.

5.3.4 Vulnerability to exploitation

Nosipho Dlamini and Bongani Hlanganani make reference below to a common practice in African communities for adults to send children on errands. The extract below from Nosipho’s interview demonstrates how she still sees herself as a child even though she is the older one at home and the head of her family because when adult neighbours ask her to do something she submits to their authority and does not say no.

“If a person asks me to do something for them I do it. I don’t refuse and tell myself that I’m the older one at home.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L519-520)

Bongani: *“I see [that I am a young person] because when I am asked to do something I do it the way I was asked to do it.”*

Interviewer: *“When who is talking?”*

Bongani: *“My aunty or any other older person”*

(Hlanganani, Bongani 2, L1363; L1366; L1369)

Another means of exploitation that Nosipho describes, exemplifying the relationship of unequal power between adults and children in favour of adults, is that adults from the community get first choice of the donations meant for orphans and vulnerable children distributed through community care-workers. The young people who “stay alone” without adults to fight for them then get the leftovers.

“What can I say? People in the area just take things, it is a long story. Like we used to be given clothes and shoes only to find out that we were getting leftovers. People choose theirs first.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L474-476)

When asked how the experience of being from a child-headed household is likely to influence her as an adult, Nosipho’s response is humbling against a backdrop of examples of ways in which adults have abused their power in their dealings with these young people. She displays an acute awareness of how age can be used as an oppressive force.

“When I see that I have grown older than them, treat them harder or just leave to do bad things or take them for granted because they are younger and make them do whatever anyhow....I will not do that....It’s because I know that it’s not right. I’ve seen lots of people do that to their families, I don’t know why they do that. Maybe they see themselves as better than the others at that point because they are older.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L670-672; L678; L692-694)

5.3.4.1 Physical abuse

Sipho Mabuza relates that not having an adult in their home to stand up for them means that they are not shown any respect and he provides the example of being blamed for anything that goes wrong in the community. Nosipho Dlamini reports being randomly told off by some members of the community which she similarly attributes to the fact that there is no adult at home to protect or defend her:

“And another thing is here in this area we stay in people do not respect a home without an elder, like a man, they do not take notice, they just do like anyhow, they have no respect because there is no adult”

(Mabuza, Sipho 1, L 257-259)

“Like if something happens in the community and they suspect someone, they just start from the house where they know that there are no elders who can defend me if I am a suspect.” (Mabuza, Siphon 1, L268-270)

“Not all of them it’s just a few that come and tell us off because they know that there is no adult.”

(Dlamini, Nosiphon 2, L573-574)

Zama Dlamini and Bheka Nkosi provide further examples of how they are vulnerable to various forms of abuse, including physical abuse, by some members of the community due to the absence of an adult figure in their homes to safeguard them:

“Some take us for granted, they do that because they know that there isn’t a person that I would go and report to and tell them that so and so is doing this to me.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L413-414).

When asked for an example, Zama replied:

“It’s maybe when a person just tells you off by the road or hits you knowing that you have no one to tell that there is so and so slapping me.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L426-427).

“...sometimes there is that thing and they look at me with that eye like I am nothing in the community and abuse me because I have no mother or someone who can fight for me....Like maybe they want to hit me and send me somewhere by force even if I tell them I am rushing home then they say you will go home some other time.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1471-1473; L1480-1481)

Thandiwe clearly explains the importance of the presence of her aunt who lives across the road in terms of protecting them:

“...She also stands up for us. She guards us because we are both young, Bongani and I. She guards us.”

(Hlanganani, Thandiwe 2, L1350-1352).

5.3.4.2 Sexual abuse

According to what both the girls and boys report, girls are particularly at risk. The vulnerability of young girls is shockingly evident in that all participants said that they thought that girls were more vulnerable than boys specifically in terms of the threat of sexual abuse. It was the understanding of these young people that girls from child-headed families were more likely to fall victim to this type of abuse because perpetrators were more likely to take advantage of them knowing that there is no parent or elder in the home:

“It’s because they [girls] are not safe in the community and there are many thugs around they could come in and rape the girl knowing that there won’t be an adult to protect her inside.”

(Mabuza, Siphho 2, L1406-1408)

“...when girls stay alone thugs can come in and rape them and abuse them in many ways.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1779-1780)

During the second interview with Siphho Mabuza it emerged that he had arranged for his sister to sleep at the neighbour’s house. Because their rural home consists of two separate buildings and he stays in one and she in the other, as is common practice in traditional rural homesteads for men and women to live separately, he felt that she was particularly vulnerable. When asked about this he replied:

“It’s because she is a girl and there is no one who doesn’t know that we stay alone and there is no person who doesn’t know that I sleep in the other house, a person could come in and do whatever.”

(Mabuza, Siphho 2, L298-300)

“Girls are in danger more than boys cause anything can happen to them. It’s better being a boy cause they can talk for themselves and fight as well. A girl cannot talk for herself if a thug comes in, a boy is better than a girl”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L840-842)

The suggestion put forward by Zinhle about boys being less vulnerable than girls is mirrored by Zama in the following extract:

“A person could come in and rape girls and not do anything to the boys.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L699)

Mndeni Ndebele explains that this is because:

“...girls can't fight for themselves and boys can fight for themselves.”

(Ndebele, Mndeni 2, L1548)

Zinhle also shared an actual experience of sexual abuse that she had had which presents a tragic example of the fact that this is a very real danger:

“The problems in my life is the fact that here in Mayville even if a person is abusing you there is no one you can talk to, so such things are problems in my life because the other day I was walking here by the road near the stop street and these two guys took me to the field ground and raped me. That's the way I encounter problems because I think sometimes if there was an older person at home this wouldn't have happened to me cause people do such things knowing that “well they stay alone”. It's a problem cause even if I can go home anyone can just come in because they know that we stay alone, there is no older person. I think sometimes even if there is a problem and I run home to hide it's useless cause anyone can just come in so...”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L176-185)

The idea that girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse is not unique to these young people or specific to their communities but rather a common conception held by society more generally. In popular discourse rules governing children's space are visibly gendered. For instance, Hood-Williams (2001) points to the common opinion that girls are more vulnerable and should therefore be subject to more restriction than boys in order to protect them from potential harm by strange adults. This positioning of girls as unsafe when compared with boys was explored by Valentine (1997) who

cites the commonly held view that girl children are more vulnerable to the potential threat of sexual assault than boys. In a study conducted in northwest England she found that after puberty parents tended to feel that boys were more physically able to defend themselves and they were less concerned about this form of danger in respect of their boy children.

5.3.5 Supportive adults

In light of the perceived and recognised vulnerability of children and adolescents to abuse and exploitation the response of many of the more supportive adult figures in these young people's lives is one of protectiveness towards them. This section explores ways in which the adult members of the communities are perceived to be caring and supportive, in the way that they offer well-meaning advice. This „stepping in' and caring for children or young people that do not have their own parents takes a variety of different forms. Bheka relates that there are people who are “looking out” for him and who advise him that he should not run away from home; Mbali describes how members of the community tell her that she must take care of her home and Siphso similarly describes how he is reminded by community members of his duty as the eldest male to look after his home.

“...I see that I am still a child because there are people who are still looking out for me and give me advice....they tell me that I shouldn't run away from home, I must stay there always”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1281-1282; L1358-1359)

“Like they would say you must take care of your mother's home and know that your mom left you in charge, you are the older one left now.”

(Luthuli, Mbali 2, L684-685)

“It's because they know that there isn't an older person, I am the eldest, they tell me that I am the head of the family, there must be a sign that there is a boy who lives there, I mustn't let my house go down even in the yard I mustn't let it become a bush.”

(Mabuza, Siphso 2, L841-844)

The idea of young people perceived to be morally immature and requiring guidance by adults emerges here. Extracts from Bheka, Mandla and Siphó's interviews exemplify this:

"...he [his uncle] tells me that my son be strong and be a man on earth, it's like this, he gives me advice about bad things...I mustn't lose respect and do bad things like robbing people, things like that."

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1431; 1434)

"Maybe I am going with people who drink and come back home at night. They tell me as a child sometimes that, like their children, I mustn't come back at night, I must come back in time just like other kids."

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L821-823)

"They give us advice that we shouldn't do bad things because we are still kids and we shouldn't rush adult things.... When I meet them they tell me that I mustn't allow the kids to come home late there must be a time where everyone must be home and not let them wander off wherever.... they said we must watch what time other kids come home don't watch just any kid we must watch the kids that we know are straight and be like them so that things at home can be straight."

(Mabuza, Siphó 2, L822-823; L1016-1017; L1052-1054)

What emerges in Siphó's account as a whole is the impression that the community treats him with respect and recognise him as the head of his family in certain ways, even though he is young and needs guidance. He narrates how other community members may collect his goats and cows and take them out for him when he is at school. He says that in this way they show him the respect they would show an adult. He explains that children who are being taught how to do this type of domestic work would be left to do this for themselves:

"They were going to watch and say I'm still a child I need a person to teach me domestic work. When they see the cows they will not take them out they say we will tell him to go and fetch them himself."

(Mabuza, Siphó 2, L1104-1106)

5.3.6 Stigma associated with child or adolescent headed families

Although there were a number of examples in the young people's interviews of adults being caring and nurturing towards them, on the whole the accounts of these young people give the impression that, in addition to the inferior status accorded children more generally, there is a fair amount of hostility towards young people from child-headed families within their communities.

One possible explanation for the antagonism and lack of sympathy from adults in these communities towards young people from child-headed families may be the prejudice and social exclusion associated with AIDS (Segu & Wolde-Yohannes, 2000) and the stigma attached to families with loved ones that have died of AIDS (Walker et al, 2004). Because the issue of social stigma was prominent in the literature there were some questions in this study formulated around the young people's perceptions of their community's attitudes towards them. Although there is no way of knowing for certain, there was only one participant whose account hinted at the fact that their mother may have been shunned due to her illness which, given the backdrop of the HIV/AIDS crisis in communities such as these, was most likely AIDS related.

“It means... things that we noticed that were happening when mom was still alive, mom had people who she did not get along with in such a way that she had to move from home and ended up not staying here....Yes, by the time she was very sick she ended up not staying here, she had to be taken to stay with her family kwa-Mathebula, she came back when she was even more sick and was then taken back because her condition was worse. And there was a lot of talking, there were neighbors here who lost their belongings and then they accused a guy who was staying in our house, who came to look for a job in the suburbs, who happened to be a suspect, then my mom asked him to go and stay somewhere else, as she was thinking it was him who brought problems. And that was the start of the fight between my mom and the neighbours. Up until now even us we are not on good terms with them.”

(Mabuza, Siphon 1, L226-229; 239-246)

Despite the above allusions to it, interviewees generally denied that they were aware of any ‚stigma’ attached to being from a child-headed household when questioned around this topic. Only two interviewees, Bheka Nkosi and Mndeni Ndebele, explicitly stated that people in the community may make fun of or laugh at children from child-headed families. Both of these boys were young teenagers of fourteen years at the time of the interview. Adolescence being a time when identification with peers is especially important, it is possible that these boys felt that they may be made fun of because they were different and their family situations did not fit the norm.

Interviewer: *“So the time we started this research as we are sitting here with you we asked the careworkers to call kids who stay on their own and the careworkers said some of the kids refused to come here because they said there is a bad way they are looked at, why do you think these kids don’t want us to talk to them like we are talking to you now?”*

Bheka: *I think they just don’t want to come or they are scared that people are going to make fun of them but you know you get help from people in the community who don’t have a problem with you and those who have a problem with you always try to get you down even when you get help.”*

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1518-1522; L1527-1530)

“...it’s not common in my community for kids to stay on their own.... they have relatives that they stay with”

(Mabuza, Siphon 2, L943; L1195)

Some of the behaviours or responses of the young people interviewed towards their community also hint at the possibility that they have been stigmatised in some way or another within their communities. Zinhle, for example, tells how she chose to go to a school away from where she lives to get away from her community and Nosiphon also comments on the problem of “gossip”:

“...I wanted to like go to a far school from like my community so that’s what I liked about it....I went there after my mother passed away.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 1, L361-362; L368)

“I don’t have many friends, what can I say? Friends bring a lot of gossip and conflict. At school we keep company with the three of us because we do not like talking too much and if you have friends you end up in trouble or conflict.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 1, L287-289)

When Mandla was asked who he trusts when he needs to talk to someone about something he also said:

“I talk to my siblings, discuss it with them only and no one else.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, L269)

The insinuation is made here that in response to the gossip and hostility encountered within their communities these young families stick together and stick to themselves which is likely to further contribute to the feelings of isolation and “aloneness” expressed in their earlier depictions of what it is like to be a young person from a child-headed family or a family where “kids stay alone”.

This suspicion of strangers was also shown in the way that we were initially treated as researchers and for example in the contradictions between members of the same household about the household structure. In some cases this could possibly have been attributed to the fluidity of the household contexts and the superficiality of us trying to superimpose a pre-existent idea of family structure on these families but there may also have been a sense of not wanting to make themselves vulnerable by giving out too much information about themselves. For example in the Hlanganani family the relationship of the youngest family member to the other siblings was contradicted in each of their story versions and despite persistent questioning it is still unclear where he fits in. Questioning was eventually abandoned because the conversation was beginning to take on the form of an interrogation and it was clear that these stories served a purpose in presenting a particular version of the family to us as outsiders.

5.3.7 Under surveillance

Another possible explanation for community antagonism towards young people from child-headed families is that these young people do not have parents or elders at home to control them, leaving them to „run wild’ and this potentially poses a threat to the community. There is a common assumption that children and adolescents are morally irresponsible and in need of firm discipline. This is linked to Burman’s (2008) conception of the dichotomy between children who act spontaneously on one hand and adults who have the capacity to be reflective and self-regulating (because they have been fully socialised) on the other.

Following are examples from the interviews portraying the harsh and punitive tone of adult censorship when compared with the more nurturing attitudes of adult figures in the previous section. Although adult figures in their extended families and neighbourhood communities are described by the young people as being supportive in many ways, stepping in as substitute parents and giving well-meaning advice, the young people’s perceptions of adult figures as threatening emerged as a surprisingly dominant theme.

The first account below supports the idea that young people from child-headed families appear to be under close surveillance by adults in their communities. Thulisile, one of the participants from the rural village near Eshowe, talks about how the neighbours watch her family closely and report any bad behaviour to her older, married sister who now lives a substantial distance away from the community in Durban. The tone here gives the impression that the way the neighbours have their eyes on them is not supportive, but rather more censoring.

“...the neighbours are always looking at us and they like talking if I do something wrong they go and tell my sister what I did.”

(Mabuza, Thulisile 1, L166-167)

When asked what makes her think that the neighbours are always watching them, she replies:

“It’s just that every time my sister comes back from Durban, she always comes with stories.... they never used to look at us it all started after my mom passed away, now that we live alone they all have their eyes on us.”

(Mabuza, Thulisile 1, L173-174; L185-186)

What is also interesting here is the implication that the older sister is controlling them from a distance. The next extract from Mbali’s interview also suggests that there is an adult family member that represents some form of moral authority controlling the behaviour of young people who “stay alone” from a remote location. This time that family member is a grandmother who represents the family’s values. When asked what she believes in, Mbali replies that it is not to leave her home and move in with a man. When questioned further about what makes her not do that (incidentally she has a boyfriend with whom she has already had a child) she says:

“It’s because I know that a woman before she goes to stay with a man he has to pay Lobola first, not just move in with him because that will make that man not see the need to pay and end up not paying anything, again I think even at home they are not expecting such things, because I am a girl and they are not expecting to hear that I am no longer living here in this house and I have left my mom’s children alone.”

(Luthuli, Mbali 1, L496-500)

Mandla’s family after living “alone” for two years now have a step grandmother that comes and goes from their home. When Mandla was asked why their grandmother had come to stay he explained:

“The reason is that she thought maybe because we were staying alone we might end up inviting our friends to come and stay over and end up doing wrong things when there is no adult”.

(Ndebele, Mandla 1, L137-139)

“She came and stayed with us because she saw that we were staying alone and we might end up doing the wrong things because when kids stay alone they end up doing

wrong things like stealing and people accuse them of doing things they didn't do and they end up running wild."

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L454-457)

5.3.7.1 "Girls become „whores”"

This idea of young people not being given credit for moral and social competence (Francis-Chizororo, 2007) and requiring adult supervision bears particular weight for girls in terms of their sexuality. Sisters Zinhle and Nosipho Dlamini individually reported that members of their community gossip about them and use the term „whores' when talking about them. Additionally a connection appears to have been made in this talk between being a „whore' and the absence of an adult figure in the home. This suggests that adults are believed to be responsible for regulating and controlling adolescent sexual behaviour, which is recognised culturally to be particularly powerful and potentially destructive socially (Walker et al, 2004). Furthermore, in general, sexual activity is more heavily sanctioned in respect of girls and it is socially more acceptable for boys to be sexually promiscuous (Walkerdine et al, 2001):

"Oh they talk and say these kids stay alone they do whatever they want, they are whores, they say whatever they like because they know that there is no adult."

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L608-609)

"It's their comments, like how can she do such a thing and she is so young. People talk a lot.... It happens that certain people do and say we are noisy because we stay alone and we are little whores. We do whatever we want"

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L495-496; L633-634).

The following extract suggests an acknowledgement of the phenomenon of transactional sex, whereby economically independent men may provide necessities or „treats' (Walker et al, 2004) to younger girls in exchange for sexual favours, and young girls living in a home with no elders are possibly more likely to engage in such a practice because they are less likely to be able to provide for their own material needs.

“...a girl can end up selling her body so that she can get something to eat.”

(Nkosi, Bheka 2, L1742)

The extract from Nosipho’s interview below demonstrates that she and her sisters are under suspicion by the community for this sort of behaviour and it comes across clearly that, in the eyes of those that are “telling them off” it is they who are to blame and not the supposedly more responsible and morally mature older men.

“Maybe a person comes in and tells us off and asks us, as we go to school, where did we get the money from. Did some men give it to us? You know things like that.”

(Dlamini, Nosipho 2, L590-591)

One of the ‘risks’ associated with adolescents being sexually active is falling pregnant and Mandla, mirroring popular cultural and societal belief, construes this as a **female** problem since, when asked how things may be different for a girl from a child-headed family he responded:

“It’s just that a girl ends up doing wrong things, not finishing school, getting pregnant seeing that there is no adult.”

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L1251-1252)

Falling pregnant while still in school may be viewed by adults as “irresponsible behavior” indicating that children and young people (particularly girls in this case) do not know what is good for them and that they need discipline and close supervision. The question may be asked how it is that in many ways these young people demonstrate that they are responsible and competent and yet two of the young girls interviewed have had unplanned pregnancies. There are a number of other possible explanations aside from youthful foolishness and irresponsible behavior that should be taken into consideration. For example, it is possible that the pregnancies could have resulted from these young girls being taken advantage of by boys or men. And this does not necessarily mean that any sexual encounters were forced, although this is also a possibility in light of how the interviewees unanimously described the physical vulnerability of girls relative to boys and men. Another possibility is that these girls

may have been involved in transactional sex with older men, or sex in return for some financial or material gain, as is commonplace in impoverished communities such as this one (Walker et al, 2004). A further consideration is that sexual activity is „adult’ behaviour and these young people are in many senses already „adults’.

5.3.7.2 “Boys „go off the rails””

A further demonstration of the idea that children and adolescents are not fully socialised beings and need to be under close supervision by adults is the idea that boys can be dangerous in that they may become involved in anti-social behaviours. In these young people’s communities boys are believed to be more at risk of becoming involved in various forms of anti-social behaviour such as drinking and robbing people. When asked about how it may be different for boys and girls coming from a child-headed family the following ideas came out in the participants’ responses:

“A boy could end up being hit by stress and want to do bad things and gang up with other guys and have an excuse that he is trying to earn something to help at home and end up robbing people. Boys would also drop out of school because they want to go and work to earn a living and buy things that they want.”

(Dlamini, Zama 2, L631-634)

“Boys have a lot of things, they end up drinking you know...”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L796)

“I would say it’s different cause [boys] would rather be thugs and say well we don’t have parents anymore but girls are always determined that they are going to continue with their lives, to show people out there that they can make it....They (girls) are determined, they say they wouldn’t throw their lives away, they would show people out there that they can cope even if there is no old person.”

(Dlamini, Zinhle 2, L766-768; L789-790)

In this last extract Zinhle also alludes to the idea that girls are more responsible than boys, an idea that can be linked to the perception discussed previously that girls are more likely to stay and to hold their families together. This is also related to the

common conception circulating in society at large that girls are more responsible and sensible than boys (e.g. Valentine, 1997).

Mandla's talk around the existence of child-headed households implies that he buys into the thinking that the presence of adults is required to keep young people under control. He emphasises the need for an older person in the home to "discipline" children.

"...sometimes kids end up doing wrong things because there is no old person (adult) who is going to discipline them"

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L486-487)

When asked what kind of wrong things young people would do he replied:

"Like peer pressure from their friends and end up smoking and drinking and breaking into people's houses whereas if there is an adult they wouldn't be able to do that because the adult would discipline them.... when there is an adult you don't do wrong things and if there's an old person you do not fight as kids because an adult is there to discipline."

(Ndebele, Mandla 2, L500-502; L1005-1007)

Boys may become involved in high risk and anti-social activities for reasons related to the powerlessness and vulnerability of their position as children or adolescents with limited adult support rather than because they are out of control due to a lack of adult supervision. It is too easy for community adults to blame bad or anti-social behaviour such as promiscuity in girls or drinking and stealing in boys on the fact that there are no adults to reign them in. As girls may become involved in activities such as transactional sex, boys may do things out of desperation such as steal to provide for themselves and their families or drink to escape from the pain of helplessly watching their families suffer.

In the absence of parents, and with the emergence of child and adolescent headed households, it is interesting that the young people in this study are charged with socialising younger children when they are clearly under scrutiny themselves by

adults in their communities, many of whom suspect them of disruptive behaviour and various forms of moral transgression linked to the idea that young people are morally immature and in need of discipline and moral guidance by adults.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Therefore, despite the common conceptions of children and adolescents as passive, dependent and morally immature the above analysis is characterised by examples of ways in which the participants in this study are active in resisting these stereotypes. They display more competence and moral maturity than adults give them credit for in the way that they are taking care of their families, running their homes and raising their younger siblings. However their position of powerlessness in the absence of adult status is experienced as very real. Their lack of access to resources and vulnerability to exploitation in a variety of forms makes life extremely difficult for them. The presence of supportive adults in their lives provides some relief however they are also on the receiving end of a great deal of animosity and negative stereotyping within their communities as well. As it was so eloquently captured by one of the participants through the interpreter: There are those in the community who are watching them with the intention of helping them but there are also those who are watching them and waiting for them to do something wrong.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

According to Jones (1993), in society, if we are going to make a difference to children's lives then it is critical that the particular realities of this country's children are represented and understood. There is a danger in adults defining the needs of children and as researchers in the field we need to truly listen to them in order to not simply become another force that overpowers them. Burman (2008) poses a crucial question in this context. She asks how we can acknowledge and respond to conditions of children's distress adequately "without smoothing away either the pain or the differences between us and those we help" (p. 142). In other words, in our representations of children in research we need to guard against converting them to the image of what we think children and their lives should be like and identifying their needs from our perspective. Although each participant's story is, in a sense, unique, these young people's experiences of the world they are growing up in provide us with a glimpse into the broader aspects of society at large and the forces at work in it. As Jones says: "life histories can show some very large scale processes of social change at work in the small scale context of individual and family experiences" (1993, p51).

What is described in the findings of this study is a new formation of unconventionally structured families. These new family formations are distinctly different from the social normative idea of family structure based on the Western idea of nuclear family as well as the broader African notion of extended family. These different kinds of families challenge commonly held assumptions about family structure such as co-residence and the assumption that families function autonomously (Burman, 1994). In these families relationships and connections between family members span generations and different household spaces and interrelationships extend to various "outsiders" as well. In their talk, however, the participants indicate clearly that what they aspire to is the more conventional definition of the families they once had, comprising adult caregivers and dependent children. This is linked to the observation that they buy into the idea of carefree childhoods although they do not have them. This is seen in the tone of nostalgia that emerges when they talk about their lives when their parent(s) were still with them and about the lives that they want for their own unborn children.

What is particularly striking is the sense of being “alone” that comes through in all of the participants’ accounts. The organic description of themselves that emerged from their own talk: “kids who stay alone” epitomises these feelings of desertion and isolation. And yet when we look at their lives from the outside in, we see that they are connected with a number of people that provide them with varying levels of support. In fact, in addition to their interactions with family (near and far) and neighbours, their lives are also connected with significant “outsiders” as is seen in the family diagrams and family descriptions.

Their experience of feeling ostracised and of “not being heard” most likely stems from them being on the “periphery”. Children running their own homes is not a child-like behaviour according to common conceptions and child-headed households are not “ok” as we were told by some of the participants. The lack of acknowledgement of these children as a group with special needs distinct from others is seen in the example of Mandla Ndebele, sitting silently in community meetings, a forum that exists for the purpose of addressing the needs of that community. It is as if, because child-headed families do not fit the norm, they do not exist. Outside agencies, responding to the label “child-headed families” that recognises the emergence of this family form as an actual social phenomenon, are beginning to filter in and see to the specific needs of these families and they are increasingly becoming a permanent and critical part of the young people’s support networks.

The perceived “aleness” of these young people also stems from the stigma associated with coming from a child-headed family. Although none of the participants appeared to consciously acknowledge that there was any stigma attached to children or adolescents living in a home without adults, it came through strongly in their accounts that they were on the receiving end of what they perceived to be a great deal of hostility from adults in their communities. The theme of hostility towards these children and suspicion surrounding their behaviour is surprisingly dominant and overshadows the more expected finding of adult sympathy and support to a large extent. The issue of gossip emerged in their talk and some of them speak of sticking together and only talking to each other about their problems, indicating a defensive response to this victimisation. It is particularly humbling, given the shaky and fragile connections of their current family structures, to see the sense of responsibility these

young people have towards their families, their loyalty to each other and the way that they stick together and the new forms of collective decision making that are emerging. This displays the importance these young people place on togetherness and looking out for each other, formed by their experience of feeling alone in the world.

It is particularly interesting that although adolescents from adolescent-headed households are considered to be unruly and morally incompetent by some members of their communities due to a lack of adult supervision in their homes, linked to the common conception that children are not fully socialised and lack the moral maturity of adults, there are many examples in their stories that challenge this assumption and reveal how they respect each other and adults in their lives, and how they love and care for each other despite the hardships they suffer. When one considers some of the reported behaviour of adults abusing and exploiting children and young people in the data this brings into question the idea that adults, by virtue of being adults, should be deemed morally superior. What is far more visible is that adults have an automatic level of authority and power that positions children and adolescents as inferior by comparison.

Nevertheless these young people are regarded by many adult members of their communities with suspicion and kept under close surveillance and censorship. However, as Fay (1996) explains culture is complex and characterised by conflicting beliefs and rules and ambiguous messages. So, in other words, in our culture, we may view children as innocent and dependent on one hand and dangerous and savage on the other. Many adult members of these adolescents' communities adopt a less hostile and more protective stance in their regulation of children. There are also many examples of caring and nurturing, advice giving and care by adult community members in the young people's accounts. In the analysis these two conflicting styles of adult "regulation" experienced by the young people; protective and caring on one hand and hostile and threatening on the other, are clearly evident. Either way these adolescents are perceived to be morally inferior to adults and in need of guidance and discipline. Fay (1996) attributes this sort of polarity to the fact that cultural rules are open to interpretation that requires judgement on the part of agents.

Another interesting contradiction that emerged from the research is that rules intended to protect children and young people are not always in their best interests, however, they are expected to submit to them regardless on the grounds that adults make them, teach them and pass them on. Children are not supposed to question adults because they make the rules. Adults are figures of authority even if they do not know what is best for children. An example of this is found in Nosipho Dlamini's story in which the life cover pay-out her family should have received on the death of their mother was withheld from them by the insurance company at their moment of greatest need because they were deemed too young and incompetent to manage a bulk sum of money responsibly.

The notion of child/adults, adult/children suggests that these are not mutually exclusive categories; many behaviours and responsibilities performed within the context of these young people running homes support that the fact that these boundaries are far more fluid. However, although the categories of "child" and "adult" may be socially constructed, they are perceived as being real. Children or adolescents may be taking on adult responsibilities and running households but they are all too familiar with the power differential that accords them an inferior status to that of adults and makes them vulnerable. It is perhaps partly as a result of this that all of the participants placed a large amount of emphasis on education as a means to attaining financial autonomy and ultimate independence. Despite delayed school progression and large gaps in their schooling due to the substantial burden of other "work" outside of school, they spoke unanimously about education as their key to a better future for themselves and their families.

The commonly held perception that children are incompetent in comparison to adults is seen to be resisted in a variety of ways through the participants' accounts. A particularly unexpected finding that supports this argument is the way that these families consult on important issues and share out tasks and responsibilities. In the absence of an adult authority figure that would automatically be accorded leadership status within the household their home lives are governed by a far more democratic system made possible partly as a result of their circumstances but also partly due to their creativity and resistance to the stereotypical functioning of "normal" families.

Gender was a pervasive and recurrent theme in the findings that emerged from this study. Despite the numerous ways in which the young people's behaviour challenged and resisted conventional thinking about children and adolescents, their gendered identities were stereotypical and entrenched. According to Billington et al (1998) how we see ourselves and how others see us is integral to our identities and therefore the roles we play become an important part of our identities. The most striking example of the deeply entrenched and unchallenged gender stereotypical role playing can be found in Thandiwe Hlanganani's account when she explains that she knows that the cooking and cleaning are her responsibility because she is a girl and there is nothing she can do about that! The gender issue also comes through strongly in the overarching theme of girls and women holding families together and boys and men as largely absent and uninvolved in home and family life. Although it did appear that the burden of household chores and childcare was shouldered primarily by the girls, which was a predictable theme based on both the literature and popular discourse, it should be noted that four out of the six adolescent heads of households interviewed were young men and that their stories are characterised by caring and nurturing attitudes towards their families and a strong commitment to standing by them.

According to Fay (1996) people on the periphery of society who do not fit the norm, either because they do not want to or because they are unable to, challenge the system. This can be seen in the way that child or adolescent headed households and the complex adult networks within which they function, present a distinctly different picture to the more conventional conceptions of family. Similarly, children or adolescents taking on full adult responsibilities and acting as adults presents a further challenge to the conventional „borders' of childhood and adulthood that have shifted over time and will continue to do so.

The young people in this study have actively risen to the challenge of running their homes and display remarkable competence, moral maturity and autonomy in the process. They have adapted and found new ways of doing things in the absence of stable and permanent adult figures of authority and adopted a more democratic and shared means of running their homes which challenges the more usual mode of operation in families whereby children submit to the authority of their parents. They are also actively engaged in attempting to secure better futures for themselves through

their commitment to their educations. However, being on the front line of social change comes at a cost. Their challenging of society's popular understanding of what children should do and be positions them on the "periphery" and they feel alone, unheard and victimised within their communities. This is seen in the stereotypes that have formed about children and adolescents in this situation which most likely stem from what Burman (2008) describes as society's powerful reactions to children who are active and autonomous and who do not fit the common conception of children as passive, dependent and innocent.

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Appendix 1: Consent form and letter.

PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW FOR PROJECT „Child Adults / Adult Children: Growing up in KZN’.

Research Supervisor’s contact details

Natal

Prof. J. Bradbury

Tel: (031) 260 3261

University of KwaZulu-

School of Psychology

Howard College Campus

Durban

4001

2008-08-06

Dear

REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY:

I am a postgraduate student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and I am conducting a research study that focuses on children in KwaZulu-Natal that are growing up in households where there are no adults and therefore taking on adult responsibilities.

The working title of the research project is:

Child Adults / Adult Children: Growing up in KZN.

I intend to conduct semi- structured interviews with selected participants - in a private venue, and at a date and time of your choice. The initial interview with each participant will be approximately 1 hour long, and will be recorded so that an accurate transcript of the interview can be made.

A second interview will be conducted for the follow up and clarification of material obtained in the initial interview. All recordings and transcripts are confidential. Only the researchers and the research supervisor, Prof. J. Bradbury, will have access to the recordings. Your confidentiality is further assured by the use of a pseudonym that may be chosen by you, throughout the interview. At no stage will your personal details be recorded on any of the research documentation. Participant anonymity will be assured by

suitably modifying any potentially recognisable incidents or views described so that they cannot be identified.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and that you may withdraw from the study at any time. By participating in this study and signing the consent form overleaf you indicate that you consent to take part in the study. Provision has been made for free, professional counseling at the School of Psychology clinic – should this be required at any stage throughout the research process. The contact details for the Clinic Director are as follows: **Prof. D. Cartwright, tel. (031) 260 2507.**

This research is being conducted with the permission of the University of Kwazulu-Natal's School of Psychology and the Humanities faculty.

Should any participant wish to contact us about the outcome of the research once the results have been collated, we would be happy to discuss the project with them and have recorded our contact details above.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Jeanne Haley
(Student)

RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM

I hereby state that I have read the research study consent letter and have understood the content.

I _____ **(full names of participant in block capitals please)** hereby consent to take part in this research study and agree to be interviewed about growing up in a household with no adults - in respect of my participating in the semi-structured interviews, as conducted by a University of KwaZulu-Natal psychology masters student. I understand the nature and content of the study, and that the study is further intended as a student-learning project. I understand that free professional counseling is available to me at the Psychology clinic at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I might withdraw from the study at any time. I further consent to the tape recording of the individual interviews by the researcher, and understand that the recordings and information disclosed are confidential and will not be accessed by any other person aside from the research supervisor for the project, and will further not be disclosed to any other person. I understand that the research study's findings will be in the form of a report in which my confidentiality and anonymity will be protected and preserved.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Witness)

Appendix 2: McAdam's (1993) personal narrative interview protocol (cited in Crossley, 2000a).

1. Life chapters

An outline of the life story, including what makes for the transition from one chapter to the next

2. Key events

A critical incident or a significant episode

3. Significant people

Relationships and the way in which they have impacted the life story

4. Future script

The plan, outline or dream the respondent has for their future

5. Stresses, problems and obstacles in life stories and work on resolutions

6. Personal ideologies or guiding values

7. Life theme according to the respondent's perspective

Appendix 3: List of topics for semi-structured interview.

1. How do children construct their identities as heads of households and decision makers?

How did it come about that you took on the responsibility of looking after your family?

What is different about how you see yourself now from how you saw yourself before?

2. What strategies are employed by child heads of households in running their homes?

What does looking after your family involve?

What needs to be done to ensure that your family is taken care of?

How is this different from before?

3. How are roles negotiated within child-headed households?

What role does each family member play / what tasks does each family member do?

How is this decided?

4. How do child heads of households make sense of or negotiate the contradiction of assuming adult responsibilities in the absence of adult status?

In your opinion what ways do you consider yourself to be like an adult and why?

In your opinion what ways do you still feel like a child and why?

In the opinion of others what ways do you consider yourself to be like an adult and why?

In the opinion of others what ways do you still feel like a child and why?

5. What is the nature and extent of the interaction between children in child headed families and adults in their extended families and communities.

Who are the adults in your life at the moment (near and far)?

Please talk about your relationships with them and what role(s) they play in your life.

6. What are children of child-headed families' perceptions of their community's attitudes towards them?

Do you think that people in your community see you any differently because you are a child-headed family? How so? What makes you think this (examples)?

Why do you think the care workers say that some families didn't want to be interviewed because of the 'stigma' attached to being a child-headed family?

7. What are children of child-headed families' perceptions of the barriers and opportunities that exist in terms of their integration into wider society and their hopes, plans and dreams for their futures?

What does being from a child-headed family mean in terms of becoming an adult?

What opportunities do you see for your future?

What is getting in the way of these?

How do your circumstances differ from those of others?

Do you think there are more obstacles because you are from a child-headed family?

What are these?

8. How does gender impact the experience of children in child-headed families?

What is it like being a girl in a child-headed family?

What is it like being a boy in a child-headed family?

How do you think the experience is different if you are a boy or if you are a girl?