

EXPLORING CHILD HEADED FAMILIES: A CASE STUDY ON SCHOLASTIC EXPERIENCE OF LEARNERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

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DECLARATION

I, Thandazile Angel Nxumalo, hereby certify that this research project, conducted under the supervision of **Dr Lokesh R. Maharajh** at the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for the acquisition of any degree or diploma at another tertiary institution. Where use was made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.

T A Nxumalo

Date

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

As the candidate's supervisor, I have approved this dissertation for submission.

Dr Lokesh R. Maharajh

February 2015

DEDICATION

I would love to dedicate this work to the following people; I strongly believe their sincere contributions in my life are worth the dedication. My dearest husband, Sibusiso Nxumalo, for his contribution and dedication to my education. To my loving two sons, Msizi and Buhle, for not being there for them when they needed me most. Their patience and the love that they showed to me will never be forgotten.

Over and above to my beloved late mother, Doreen Mhlongo, who was praying for me, wishing to see me being something. All the successes that I have attained in my academic career are the results of the solid foundation that my family has laid.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore scholastic experiences of learners who are from child headed families. The research questions in this study were: *What are the experiences of children who come from child headed homes? And why do children who come from child headed homes have these particular experiences?*

The study was informed by interpretivist paradigm that attempted to understand how the learners from child headed families cope in the school environment. The learners who are affected by being children from child headed households were sources of data for the study. Data was collected from various school records, such as schedules for class results and attendance records from class registers to ascertain the impact of challenges for these learners. The data from the interviews were analysed thematically. It can be said that the scholastic experience of children from child headed households is varied. The study has shown that while some experience difficulty in coping with scholastic activities and home life, others have displayed resilience, and have coped quite admirably. This goes without saying that a child is a child irrespective as to what kind of background she/he comes from. . Every child is unique. However, this study has raised quite a significant number of issues pertaining to how children from child headed households are able to cope with their situation so that it has a minimal effect on the scholastic experience of these learners. A lot still has to be done in order to empower the children from child headed households in South Africa. The results of this study are not exhaustive but may just be the tip of the ice-berg on the plight of children from child headed households in their scholastic experience. Therefore, there is a need for more in depth studies on the topical issue One of the possible implications of this study is that children from child headed homes need intervention from various government and non-government institutions so that they can have a better scholastic experience with a possibility of more stable future.

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CHAPTER ONE

EXPLAINING THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

At her home in South Africa, Rebecca recalls her father being sick from the time she was 13. He died in 2005 and when her mother passed two years later it was left up to Rebecca to look after her four brothers and two sisters. Every day, she has to find ways to feed and school a family that now depends on her. Four of her siblings go to school but Rebecca has to remain home to look after her youngest brothers as she cannot afford to send them to day-care. Rebecca and her siblings stay in their parents' house in an informal settlement east of Johannesburg, and depend solely on the money that she gets from the tenants who have rented outside rooms¹.

Rebecca accompanies her siblings to and from school. Rebecca's story is one of thousands of children who head homes in South Africa. According to newspaper reports, children from child headed households face many challenges. I have been in a school environment as an administration clerk and teacher since 2000. In these past fourteen years I have come across many Rebecca's, some with similar stories, others who are in a worse situation than Rebecca.

In my fourteen years in a school environment, I have encountered many children who come from child headed households. These experiences therefore became a motivation for me to explore the experiences of children who come from child headed households.

In the sections to follow in this chapter, I describe the background of the study, and the purpose, focus and the rationale of the study. Thereafter I list the critical questions elaborating briefly the ambit of the questions. In my research methodology I use interviews and analysis of school records. I provide an overview of the salient aspects of each of the chapters contained in this dissertation.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The idea conveyed by inclusive education is that the classroom consists of a diversity of learners. According to Education White Paper 6 (Republic of South Africa, 2001) this diversity refers to the situation where one should understand and accept that learners are

¹Taken from <http://www.beatit.co.za>

different and unique in nature. Hence, the curriculum must be responsive to the needs of all learners and ensure that these learners actively participate equally in the education process. According to Forlin (2004) the teacher is the mechanism to mediate inclusivity and to instil proper teaching and learning by catering for different student learning needs. Children are an integral part of the broader society and can play a meaningful role if they have been properly reared (Ashford 2006). Society decrees that children are to be raised in a family, nuclear or extended, with adults in these families providing for the physical, physiological, psychological, social and emotional needs of the children ensuring that their rights as stipulated in South African Constitution are recognised (Awino, 2010).

This is endorsed by the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) which describes a family as a basic unit of society that provides services to its members. In Africa it was found that eight percent of the children were living in child headed households and need care, i.e. children, youth, the aged and the frail. The composition, structure and function of a household may change drastically and dramatically as a result of death, disease, unemployment, displacement or war, resulting in child headed households. According to the Department of Social Development (2005) a child headed household is a household where both parents are deceased and the remaining occupants are children of the deceased and are all legally considered as minors under the law. Furthermore, Meintjies, Hall, Marera and Boulle, (2010) in their general household survey of 2006 in South Africa, found that eight percent of the children were living in child headed households.

As child headed households occur within the social environment, I wanted to understand the suffering of these children, more especially in South Africa where the situation is grim. In the 2001 census there were 248 427 registered child headed households. This number has since increased. Smart (2003) reported that in the 2002 International Labour Organisation (ILO) household survey it was reported that almost 22% of all children under fifteen years of age in the households included in the survey had lost a parent. At the time of reporting in 2003, about 7% of children under the age of eighteen years were indicated as care givers with girls being more likely to fulfil this role than boys (Smart, 2003). Another concern communicated in the survey was that 39.6% of households in the study reported that the primary care giver had taken time off from schooling to take care of an AIDS infected person. The United Nations programme on Human Immune Virus /Affected Immune Deficiency Syndrome (2006) reported 1, 2 million orphans as a current figure, with seven hundred children being orphaned annually as a result of AIDS. Furthermore, Jansen Van Rensburg (2006) argued

that it is estimated that by 2015, about 1, 97 million children in South Africa will have lost both parents while 3.05 million will constitute maternal orphans.

The Table below shows the number of orphans according to countries in Africa.

Table 1.1. Number of orphans in Africa: UNAIDS (2006)

Country	Number of Orphans
South Africa	1,200, 000
Tanzania	1,100, 000
Zimbabwe	1,100, 000
Kenya	1,100, 000
Uganda	1,000, 000
Nigeria	930,000
Zambia	710,000
DR Congo	680, 000
Malawi	550, 000

From table 1.1. above we see that in 2006 South Africa had the highest number of orphans in comparison to other listed countries in Africa. The Department of Social Development (2007) in its situational analysis of Child Headed Households found that the increasing morbidity and mortality rates among adults as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, chronic debilitating diseases, disabilities, poverty, violence, crime, motor vehicle accidents and lingering social maladies of migrant work have resulted in growing numbers of child headed households in South Africa².

The extremely rapid rate of orphanhood and destitution among children makes it difficult for families and communities to respond in the traditional manner of taking these children into extended families. The situation has led to the emergence of a new form of a family structure: a household headed by one of the affected children, or simply a child headed household³. According to Chilangwa (2004), the child headed household is a situation where children live alone in a home where there are no adults to take the responsibility of care and support.

²www.dsd.gov.za

³www.dsd.gov.za

The main challenge for the head child is to keep the household routine, including continuous access to school, after the parents have died. A study on special needs of children in child headed household's reports the attempts made by the head child to sustain education in activities like home-work and peer learning when he/she can no longer afford to physically attend school because of the household duties and responsibilities, (Nelson Mandela Children's Fund 2001). The study reports a high dropout rate as a consequence. Ayieko (2004) argued that challenges involve emotional decisions in relation to dispersal of siblings, relocation or making contact with the extended family as well as taking care of outstanding debt and planning the future of the family. Furthermore, Smith (2003) contended that the rights of children to education, rest, play and recreation are compromised by having to take on adult responsibilities prematurely and having to take sole charge of the household. These challenges impact on the child's attendance and concentration at school which results in poor scholastic performance.

It is against this background that I decided to conduct a study on the scholastic experience of learners who come from child headed families. The focus of the study is on the scholastic experience of learners from child headed families in a secondary school at Ndwedwe. This study aimed to examine the *experiences of children who are from child headed households* as they are faced with the responsibility to look after themselves as well as their siblings. It must be borne in mind that these children not only face the brunt of losing a parent, they are also challenged by psychosocial needs, poverty, poor nutrition and caring for sick parents before they die as well as caring for sick siblings. Furthermore, I aimed to explore further their fears and their future dreams particularly because they have to cope with different tasks given to them at school by their teachers over and above the socio-emotional challenges they encounter.

1.3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

As an experienced teacher in a secondary school I was able to particularly note the children from child headed households by their state of upkeep. This includes whether the child is unkempt, late at school or inattentive in class. Furthermore, I noticed that there are a number of children enrolled in my class who are heading their families. This is conveyed by the lack of parental information as required during the enrolment process. I decided to take a stand to find out more about their motivation to learning by these learners who lack parental

involvement. Furthermore, the alarming prevalence of children in my class who are heading families motivated me to undertake this study. Moreover, as a teacher I am expected to fulfil the role of an *in loco parentis*.

In my teaching experience I am aware that the learners I teach have mixed abilities and learners have diverse education needs. It becomes a struggle to get every single learner to perform at the expected norm for the grade (Ayieko, 1997). I also believe that every learner can succeed and the learner with barriers to learning should not be pressurised but given the opportunity to develop at their own pace. According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) there is a growing number of child headed families in South Africa. This indicates an abnormal condition in the upbringing of a child. Du Toit (2009, pp. 644-666) argued that absence of parental care results in children showing bad behaviour since they have no one to instil discipline in them at home.

The government through the Social Welfare Department provides care and support to children from child headed households. To identify them, the Department collects the data from the school about children who need a foster care grant, counselling and child support grant. The documents to collect such information are class registers and grant collection application forms. Furthermore, the South African 2011 census showed that the total number of children aged 0-17 who reported that they had lost one or both parents was more than 3 million which conveyed how big the prevalence of children from child headed homes in South Africa is (Chiastolite, 2008).

I strongly believe that this study will be for professional interest since the results will help to equip teachers with skills to deal with issues arising from children who come from child headed families in their classrooms. The study can be an eye-opener for the Department of Basic Education to develop protocols such as psychiatric programmes and counselling to those children from child headed families who cannot cope academically. Furthermore, this study can create awareness in the Social Welfare Department that serves the area, about the children who need their attention.

This study has the potential to lead to further research and add to the contributions of other studies conducted, for example a study by Chiastolite Professional Services (2008) on child headed households in Gauteng Province, where the survey showed that there was an alarming

prevalence of child headed households. Findings from the Chiastolite Professional Services study revealed that children lost parental care due to: abandonment, parent/caregiver death (cause of death unknown), unnatural causes and HIV or AIDS.

Having explained the background and rationale of this study, I will now proceed to introduce the critical research questions and provide an overview of the research methodology adopted in this study.

1.4. CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In keeping with the topic of this study (exploring the scholastic experience of learners who are from child headed households), the study set to answer the following critical questions:

What are the experiences of children who come from child headed homes?

Why do children who come from child headed homes have these particular experiences?

The research methodology used to collect data to answer the above research questions is explained in detail in chapter four. I provide a brief overview of the methodology here.

1.5. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach since it is interested in obtaining in-depth answers to the research questions presented in the previous section of this chapter. The qualitative approach is appropriate since the aim of this study is to understand the experiences of a limited number of secondary school children who either head households or come from child headed households. This qualitative study makes use of a case study style of research. According to Yin (2009, pp. 72-73) the case study aims to represent real people in real situations which can be presented holistically by an individual, group or an organisation. He further explains that the researchers of case studies can use interviews and analysis of school records as a way of gathering information. For the purposes of this study, I gathered information from school statistics such as the class registers, written class tests, examination marks and thereafter interviewed the participants. The interview comprised mostly of open ended questions in order to get more information from the participants.

Furthermore, the study was derived from an interpretivist paradigm that attempted to understand the subjective world of human experience. The study relied on empirical information where human beings were used to collect evidence. According to Cohen and Manion (1994, p.36) an interpretivist approach to research has the intention of understanding

the world of human experience. Furthermore, Cresswell (2009, p. 21) argues that an interpretivist researcher's aim is to describe how people make sense of their world and the contexts in which they live. In this study I attempted to understand the experiences of children who either head households or are members of child headed households.

I present in the next section of this chapter the outline of the dissertation.

1.6. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The study will be organised into six chapters as follows:

Chapter one offers a background to the study and explains the rationale for the study as well as the critical research questions. The methodology employed is briefly discussed.

Chapter two provides a literature review that covers studies which have been conducted in the field of experiences of children from child headed households as well as the prevalence of child headed households in South Africa.

Chapter three describes the theoretical framework used in the study. It also highlights the resilience of children from child headed households.

Chapter four explains the methodology used to conduct the research, the research design as well as the data collection and data processing techniques employed. Furthermore, the chapter outlays the design and methods used to analyse the scholastic experience of learners from child headed households.

Chapter five begins with the discussions of findings that emerged from the learner's interviews and analysis of selected school records. In response to the critical question asked in this study, the three themes that emerged from the findings included: personal life of a child, impact on scholastic performance and the child's future dreams.

Chapter six offers some implications that arise from the findings of this study.

1.7. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I presented the background and rationale for this study and then after sharing the two research questions that have driven this study; I provided a brief overview of the qualitative research design. I concluded the chapter with an outline of the chapters in this dissertation. I will proceed now to present a literature review relevant to scholastic experience of learners from child headed households.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This literature review explores the scholastic experience of learners from child headed families. It provides a broader context regarding the scholastic experience of children who are responsible for their households. Sometimes children may become household heads whilst parents are still alive. In such cases work migration results in children living without adult supervision. In other cases parents are terminally ill so children are effectively without adult supervision. There are also cases where parents have abandoned their children. However, some children become household heads due to the loss of both parents due to death. It is necessary to review the literature on children who head their families resulting from these multiple causes mentioned above as well as the effect these various factors have on scholastic experience of these children.

2.2. UNDERSTANDING CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

According to Van der Waal (1996, p. 37) a child headed family may be due to residential instability and family arrangements such as parents leaving children on their own to seek employment and migrate to cities or towns. Sloth-Nielsen (2003) revealed that there is an upsurge of child headed families in South Africa resulting from parental death as well as a number of other factors. De Klerk, (2006) in his study in Northern Uganda revealed that war resulted in many children becoming orphans. Furthermore Bregg (2004) in his Rwandan study revealed that the 1994 genocide led to over one hundred thousand child headed families. Anderson and Phillips (2006) added that in South Africa AIDS is a main cause of parental death. Moreover, some children are abandoned by their parents for many different reasons peculiar to themselves. This is echoed by Jones, (2005, p. 163) that in Swaziland there is an upsurge in the number of child headed families due to child abandonments, displacement or when parents cannot afford to care for their children. The complexity of estimating the prevalence of child headed households is well illustrated in the Chiastolite (2008) research in South Africa when he used 2001 census data. Findings in census 2001 showed that there are a number of households in KwaZulu Natal which are headed by children.

I was further convinced that such a study was necessary since Atwine, Cantor-Graae and Bajunirwe (2005, p. 560), from their study in Uganda found that children from child headed families evidenced high levels of psychological distress and showed significantly high levels of anger. “Lack of parents in the child’s life result in children showing more signs of socio-emotional disruption” says Boris, Thurman, Snider, Spencer and Brown, (2006, p. 598). This often promotes a lack of concentration and poor performance at school.

Having discussed briefly the concept of child headed households, I will proceed to discuss the literature on how children deal with the loss of their parents.

2.3. GRAPPLING WITH PARENTAL LOSS/ DEATH

According to Segu and Wolde-Yohannes, (2000) stigma is a common experience among many child headed households, especially if their parents died of or are assumed to have died of AIDS. The above argument confirms that the death of parents due to ailments stigmatizes the child. This idea is also supported by Peter Piot (2002) when arguing that discrimination and stigma continues to stand as barriers as it silences individuals and communities and deprives them of care and support.

Furthermore, children from child headed families experience social exclusion. For example, in a Rwandan study (Boris, Thurman, Snider, Spencer and Brown, 2006, p. 598) children indicated that they felt “rejected by the community”. In addition Thurman, Snider, Boris, Kalisa, Nyirazinyoye and Brown, (2008, p. 2) indicated that communities treated these children differently because they are in child headed households. Chiastolite’s (2008) research in South Africa revealed that one of the reasons that led societies to distance these vulnerable children is the growth in their number which puts a burden on the coping strategies of families or societies at large. Chiastolite further added that many extended families find it extremely difficult to cope financially when planning to accommodate these children.

MacIntyre (2003, pp. 47-66) argued that child headed households have a feeling of being not wanted, that ends up preventing their natural development as well as their schooling. This was confirmed by Evans and Schamberg (2009, p. 106), who argue that the situation of children from child headed families may affect the psychological wellbeing of a child and leave an indelible mark on their scholastic experience.

Malinga (2002) revealed that the difficulties of caring for children in the child headed household tend to fall on girl children, resulting in psychological problems. The female children carry most of the care responsibilities for siblings and sometimes sick parents. This results in depression leading to withdrawal, sadness, isolation, moodiness which affects or contributes to behavioural problems which negatively affect their scholastic experience. Ramsden (2002) agreed with Chiastolite (2008) when predicting that by 2015, there will be an escalation of child headed families in South Africa. This indicates that the prevalence of child headed families is a growing trend and it needs more attention to come up with ways to reduce stress and trauma for the victims.

Kalipeni, Craddock, Oppong and Ghosh, (2003, p. 19) said “*Stigma separate individuals from other sources of identity and leads in degradation by other children*”. This may create alterity, or “otherness” which allows society to dehumanize and avoid responsibility for sufferers. Robson and Kanyanta, (2007) added that children from child headed households are being bullied and harassed at school leading to poor performance and dropout. Furthermore, social stigma can be an additional stumbling block to the continued education of the children. According to Goldstein, Anderson, Usdin, and Japhet, (2001), education is one of the facets of the life of a child but is threatened by HIV/ AIDS as well as for children from child-headed households in particular.

The study by ABT Associates Incorporated (2001, p. 32) on child headed households revealed that some learners are withdrawn from schooling because other children mock them. Furthermore, peers and educators exacerbate psychological trauma through stigmatization. Some children conveyed that they live on their own due to parental sicknesses, some disclosed that their parents live in hospices whereas some are bedridden at home hence the child becomes a care giver. In addition the study highlighted that many learners will be vulnerable to abuse and pressures to engage in sex work or other survival strategies. The experiences of these children may result in them missing school, facing starvation and having difficulty with concentration. Moreover, these difficulties lower the chances of the children completing basic schooling and ultimately lead to lower socioeconomic status as adults. Cluver and Gardner, (2007) further said that the findings from their study show that some of children experience the school as a place of hope from distressing home circumstances.

Another study by Operario, Pettifor, Cluver, MacPhail, and Rees, (2008) in sub-Saharan Africa witnessed that children from child headed households are less likely to attend school as they experience educational deficits.

Sengendo and Nambi (1997, p. 115) revealed that the emotional difficulty in dealing with the death of parents affects the scholastic performance of the children.

AIDS pamphlets issued by the Department of Health (2005) indicated that due to the death of their parents, children showed alarming peer relationship difficulties, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, suicidal urges, delinquency, and hopelessness. In support of the above mentioned hardships these children are vulnerable to poverty, malnutrition, stigma, exploitation, sickness, and sexual abuse, which lead to intense psychological trauma which affects their scholastic experience.

Henderson (2006, p. 312) relates the narrative of South African children coming from child headed households, saying “her evident stoicism was underpinned by anger.” These children are seen as troublesome among other learners. Fortston (2007), Evans and Miguel (2007, p. 49) argued that the relationship between the child and their next of kin (other than the parents) was not as natural as that of parents themselves and may result in failure to acquire high academic achievement, particularly because the children become suspicious and think that the relatives want to take their parents possessions and leave them vulnerable.

Evans (2010) in his report revealed that children in Tanzania who are in child headed households indicated that their housekeeping responsibilities affect their ability to learn at school. These children lack enough time to revise their schoolwork and they arrive late at school. They find it difficult to concentrate at school because they worry about caring for their siblings and the need to earn money to support the family. This results in poor educational outcomes which will reduce their employment opportunities. The children in the interview with Evans lamented that there is no shoulder to cry on since even the teachers are not aware of their hardships so they do not offer support. Masondo, (2006) argued that household heads are particularly vulnerable to dropping out of school either temporarily or permanently in order to care for their younger siblings who continue with their education. Van Breda, (2010) emphasized the ideas of the Chiastolite study (2008) when he contends that, the taking up of new responsibilities and roles was a highly salient theme as it is very difficult to act as a parent, a learner and a counsellor all at once to siblings.

The above discussion was about how children deal with the loss of their parents. The following topic will discuss the literature on scholastic experience of children from child headed households who have lost their parents.

2.4. SCHOLASTIC EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN FROM CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Ayieko, 1997, Kakooza and Kimuna, 2005, Richter, 2004 contended that these children often perform poorly at school such that they cannot afford to continue schooling and have to spend their days eking out a survival. A work and school role is too difficult to carry given their vulnerability and their schoolwork is compromised, said Hartell and Chabilall, (2005).

Evans and Schamberg (2009, p. 106), argued that child headed families are adversely affected by poverty which affects their memories that ultimately results in greater difficulty to learn than other children. Case, Anne, Paxson, and Albeidinger (2004, pp. 483-508), added that the impact of the parent's death on children's schooling results in socio-economic circumstances as well as a lack of motivation which negatively affect their performance at school. This view was supported by Lyons (2006) when emphasizing that child headed families are prone to increased poverty, poor health and poor nutrition which exacerbate poor school attendance that limits the possibility of a good school performance. This shows that these children's main worry is the status of the household budget constraints. In addition, Robson and Kanyanta (2007, p. 419) emphasised that child headed households are often extremely vulnerable and impoverished which drives them to work and prevents them from attending school, thereby affecting their academic performance.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2003) reported that the survey conducted in Botswana schools showed three key performance indicators including absenteeism, repetition, and school interruption. Learners who were caught in this confessed that they want to be like everyone else. The emphasis from the report pointed out that the provision of nutritious school meals prompts disadvantaged children to attend school and results in them perceiving their home- environment as less attractive than school: since they have little or nothing to do during the day.

Carr-Hill et al., (2000), Culver, (2007), Ebersöhn and Eloff, (2002) and Foster, (2002) in their study with teachers (participants), revealed that children from child headed households

showed an increased incidence of social, emotional, physical, economic and human rights problems which disrupt the child's scholastic performance. Hepburn, (2002) added that the consequences of such problems are played out in the classroom. "Teachers struggle to balance the already challenging business of teaching and learning with the additional demands imposed by the increased levels of anxiety, limited concentration spans, severe trauma, heightened discrimination and stigma, and increased poverty experienced by learners who are vulnerable" (Foster and Williamson, 2000; Wood, 2009).

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (2004) argued that the absence of parents promotes a lack of interaction between the family and school and it directly affects children's ability to achieve high performance in school. Since the responsibility of parents is to attend parent-teacher meetings, take part in their children's sports days and monitor their learning but the situation on child headed families is distinct from that of their peers. This was also echoed by Fortson, Evans and Miguel (2007, p. 49) when arguing that the absence of parents results in delayed enrolment, fewer hours at school once enrolled, or drop-out. They also highlighted that parents are influential in the academic achievement of children. Furthermore, the normal learning requires a parent's push in doing homework, proper wearing of school uniform and participation in other school activities. In addition Jubber (1994, p. 139) argued that the absence of parents results in a distorted family structure which exposes children to the risk of demotivation and low self-esteem. Moreover, Jubber (1994) saw that the responsibility of parents was to ensure the emotional support to the child.

The Department of Basic Education [DoBE], (2001) stipulated that all children have a right to access at educational institutions regardless of their socio-economic background as enshrined in the South African constitution (Chapter 2, Section 29, 1996). The schools have a responsibility to accept and develop children from child headed families so that they are well groomed to be socially responsible human beings. However, teachers in South African schools lack training to respond to the demands placed on them to deal with issues arising from having children from child headed families in their classrooms (Clarke, 2008). Kelly (2002) argues that young girls from child headed families are vulnerable to unsafe sex, so they are exposed to the risk of falling pregnant, which may lead to them being sleepy and passive in class and end up performing poorly in classwork and fail the exams.

Moletsane (2003) mentioned that the impact of the death of parents causes children to grow up without adult attention, supervision or love and makes them vulnerable to abuse (physical, emotional and sexual) from other members of the community. The teacher may take for granted that he/she is scaffolding learning with inclusive activities whilst missing the main issue and leaving the child in limbo. Recently, Wood and Goba (2011), in their study on the care and support of orphaned children at school, acknowledged that teacher training programmes around HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa appear not to have been very effective in helping teachers to respond to the demands placed on them by the HIV pandemic.

Nkomo (2006) places emphasis on what Moletsane (2003) alluded to, saying that children from child headed families reported experiences like being neglected by society and family, facing financial constraints and being decision makers at an early age. Moreover, Nkomo (2006) commented that these children face such things as the obligation to take the place of the deceased parents, being abandoned by extended family members and surviving in the face of economic hardships. Furthermore, Nkomo (2006) added that these children felt helplessness and uncertainty about personal safety, indiscipline, feeling of deprivation, grappling with multiple responsibilities like being the head of the household and being a child who is eager to learn at school.

Nkomo (2006) cited Pillay and Nesengani (2006, p. 132) when arguing that children depend on their parents for socialisation, self-confidence and education. The absence of parental involvement leaves the child to contend with household chores and look after his/her siblings. This motivated my study to try to find out how these children perform at school since they have to play the dual role of a child and a parent.

Mukerji and Albon (2010) argued that parents must be present in a child's life. This implies that parents must be there in their children's future to ensure their welfare, survival and development. For education to happen in the child's mind, the parent must directly enforce it. Children from child headed families have no one to enforce commitment to schoolwork and to praise good performance.

However, my study wants to link the relationship between parental involvement in children's educational life as well as child's scholastic experience.

Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm (2000, p. 317) argued that poverty among children from child headed families affects their mental and physical well-being and scholastic experience since they do not have the required material to fulfil the objectives of school. Clark (2008) agreed with Crosby, (1993), Leatham, (2008), Lethale, (2008) and Nesengani (2006) when commenting that, children from child headed families have to contend with challenging physical conditions at home such as an absence of desks to complete their homework and overcrowded rooms make it impossible to study. This indeed hampers children's scholastic experience.

My study tries to understand whether the environment which is not conducive to learning promotes barriers in learning. The above section discussed briefly the scholastic experience of children from child headed households. The next section will discuss the literature on coping and resilience strategies for children from child headed households.

2.5. COPING AND RESILIENCE FOR CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Resilience may be associated with good academic achievement since a learner with stress tends to perform poorly as proclaimed by Victor (2003, p. 7). Unger (2008) defined resilience as a process whereby individuals exhibit positive behavioural adaptation when they encounter significant diversity, trauma, threat or significant sources of stress. As a researcher, I felt that using academic achievement as a measure of resilience was more appropriate for this study.

The views from studies by Moletsane (2003) and Nkomo (2006) as well as others indicate that children from child headed households try by all means to cope at school with difficulties confronting them on a daily basis. They try to make sense and find coping mechanisms in the midst of their adversity.

Van Breda (2010) argued that although balancing the demands of managing a household with schoolwork is quite challenging, some children manage well and achieve academic success. In a study in the Free State by Shilubana and Kok (2005), they found that factors associated with academic success were, studying hard and commitment to work, strong values and moral character, accepting their situation and striving to achieve and a network of adults who check up on the children's schoolwork as well as teachers who understood the children's situation and offer to assist. This idea was supported by Leatham, (2006) who argued that

most children relied on teachers for support. The children should regard their teachers as surrogate parents or role models and seek advice and practical assistance from them.

Rutter (2005) as well as Ward and Eyber (2009) emphasized that resilience is subject to an individual's ability to interact within their environments and the process that promotes wellbeing. This is witnessed by Werner and Smith (1989) in their longitudinal study in Kauai on resilient children and youth where they found that caring friends are a major factor in the development of resiliency in the disadvantaged children.

Masten and Reed (2002) revealed that resilience is promoted by things like a strong sense of self, good social skills, a sense of purpose in life, self-control as well as individual factors such as genetics, personality and ethnicity. They also mentioned social factors such as socio-economic background, supportive caregivers and geographical proximity to others, social and community support such as support from family, friends, community, and school. Furthermore, Jaung and Silbereisen (2002) added that communities, relatives and foster parents should adopt these factors to ensure academic success.

Victor (2003) in his study on supporting resilience of children and youth identified protective factors that contribute to the resilience of children such as children's ability to solve problems and to be sociable. He also mentioned the family's warm and supportive care-giving, schools' safe environment and high monitoring of schoolwork. He then drew the conclusion saying that it is not only the individual child's characteristics which make and contribute to that learner's resilience. Cluver and Gardner, (2007) mentioned that children from child headed homes prefer to be at school for socializing and the building of friendship as an important part of educational goals. Therefore these children experience social support from peers which includes emotional and material support (clothes and food). Cluver and Gardner, (2007) concluded that socialisation helps children from child headed households to feel that they are part of the community which alleviates psychological distress resulting in positive engagement and participatory learning. Victor (2003) commented that a shy student can develop friends and self-confidence with the aid of a sensitive teacher who carefully plans cooperative learning activities that capitalize on the child's strengths.

However, Kinard (1998, p. 672) commented that academic tests and grades in school are commonly used to determine resilience with respect to cognitive functioning. Osher,

Kendziora, Van Den Berg, and Dennis (1999, p. 3) proposed the idea that the individualistic conceptualization of resilience teaches us that if a child is “man”, does well at school that means he/she is born with the right genetic makeup.

2.6. CONCLUSION

Schooling is crucial for children’s socialisation and self-efficacy. Participation in school improves children’s chances of becoming productive and socially responsible members of society. The children responsible for households are burdened with caring for siblings thus compromising their schooling. Most studies mentioned concerning child headed households have paid little attention to the children’s scholastic performance. However, South Africa has a policy of inclusive education, which allows every learner a right to proper education. This study looked closely at the scholastic experience of a child who is faced with the above mentioned experiences. In brief, the chapter has tried to review related literature which specifies socialisation as a breakthrough where the burden is shared holistically among peers to reduce psychological distress.

The next chapter analyses theoretical framework used to discuss the scholastic experience of learners from child headed families

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, the review involved envisaging scholastic experience of children from child headed households. Ideas of various authors are highlighted and interrogated in this section as a theory base for this study. The theoretical framework, Vygotsky's socio cultural theory and the resilience strategies of children from child headed households are discussed in depth.

According to Subbarao and Coury, (2004) the lack of parental involvement in the child's life has the possibility of resulting in the child suffering from the affliction of painful memories and sadness and this results in their scholastic experience being negatively compromised. Furthermore, Rambau (2008) and Venter and Rambau (2011) added that when children lose their parents their development and academic experience is negatively affected.

My study will build up on the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978) which states that child development is the result of interactions between people and their social environment. This chapter will concentrate on children from child headed households by examining their scholastic experience. Furthermore, it will look at the environments they come from, because one's developmental environment plays a crucial role in his development. Carr-Hill (2000), Ebersohn and Eloff (2002), Foster (2002) and Culver (2007) agreed that it is imperative that teachers understand the scourge of children from child-headed households as it impacts the lives of their learners, resulting from an increased incidence of social, academic, emotional, physical, economic and human rights problems.

3.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework according to Rudestam and Newton (1992) introduces and describes the theory which explains the research problem under study. He added that an explicit statement of theoretical assumptions is essential in order to permit the reader to evaluate the study critically. It directs the researcher to the existing knowledge and lays the basis for research methods to follow.

My study will be based on the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory lingers on the phenomenon of the surroundings around the child. The focus of the research will attempt to explore Vygotsky's theoretical framework on child development and link it with scholastic experience of children who come from child headed households.

Vygotsky in his theory places emphasis on learning which emphasises the fact that the elders play important roles in helping children to learn through for instance, sharing knowledge and experiences. He mentioned that adults mediate the world for children and make it possible for them to get access to it. Therefore ability to learn through instruction and mediation is characteristic of human intelligence. Cameron (2002, pp. 5-8) suggested that with the help of adults children can and do understand more than they can on their own. The children from child headed families generally miss this opportunity to have close adult intervention in their lives.

Vygotsky in his theory also mentioned that a child typically learns through interactions with parents, teachers, or more experienced peers and ultimately acts independently. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1986) extended his theory on cultural-historical theoretical legacy and an ideology that education can shape the child's development in totality. Here he claimed that children are considered life theorizers in the sense that they attach the wrong meaning to the present situation at home. The theory will be used to influence the theoretical framework for the study since it holds relevant views to that of researchers in the field of learning, particularly child development. This correlates with the views of Inagaki & Hatano, (2002, p. 126), where they see children as active agents in their own learning and inquiry into understanding the world. This indeed shapes the performance of the child in the classroom where despite provisions by caregivers, they cannot move on from their past of having no-one who is blood related.

Children from child headed households will always be inquisitive about the cultures and communities they live in. Vygotsky in his theory explained that teachers will mediate a link in terms of both curricular and pedagogical approaches as well as the way of cultures and communities within children's zones of proximal development (ZPDs).

Vygotsky (1986) introduced the idea that children need opportunities to think, inquire, participate and discuss ideas with others. This implies that growing up in a family will shape the children's future. Furthermore, Vygotsky added that the child's development is shaped by cultural-historical inheritances. He also valued children's early experiences in families and communities, as viewed as a foundation for later cognitive development. Moreover, he claimed that children need to be informed about the values of society and of families to equip them to become contributing members of the society and family. Since children from child headed households have no one to alert them about proper values, they are likely being marginalised.

Vygotsky (1978, p. 57) argued that learning a skill is developed with adult guidance through internalization of culture and social relationships. Parents play a role in socialising children through learning, providing ideas to calm tension, telling stories and asking questions. Through parent and child interaction, parents mediate the world for a child and make it possible for him/ her to get access to the world. Hence I was eager to explore scholastic experience of these children under study.

3.3. SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

Constructivism is a theoretical perspective that appreciates that people including children continue to construct knowledge as individuals, groups or societies (Berk, 2007; Driscoll, 2009; Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2010). It challenges the positivist's traditional scientific methods that knowledge exists somewhere, that it is absolute and unchanging and therefore there is need to unveil it and prove its existence.

According to Vygotsky, the following assumptions, all linked to constructivism, try to explain the process of learning and cognition. He assumes that learning is a social process, where cultural symbols and signs help to develop concepts as children construct new ideas. The child's interactions and socialization with other individuals in the environment assist in the total human development, especially cognitive development. Learning is contextualized and situated within the child's culture and experiences. New connections are made through mediation, scaffolding and interaction. Language within the child's culture can be used to facilitate learning and cognition (Vygotsky, 1978 in Chaiklin, 2003 and Feldman, 2010).

Interaction with the surrounding culture and social agents such as parents, teachers and more competent peers, contribute significantly to a child's intellectual development. The interaction process entails that, siblings, parents and friends hand over cultural tools such as language through socialization (Duncan et al, 2007; Atherton, 2011).

Psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978) uses sociocultural theory which believes that human development (child development) is the result of interactions between people themselves and their social environment. In the course of child development, a child is typically nurtured through interacting with parents, teachers, or more experienced peers (Hewett, 2001). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory sees development as a sociocultural construct that involves interpersonal imparting of ideas. This idea was made clear by Scrimsher & Tudge, (2003) that indigenous knowledge is imparted to children by the people surrounding the child. Woolfolk (2001, p. 332) concurs with Vygotsky's idea that knowledge grows through the interactions of internal (cognitive) and external (environmental and social) factors.

Vygotsky (1978) termed the knowledge created through teacher-child or in homes, functions as a foundation for learning known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). To reach the ZPD, children need the help of adults or more competent individuals to support or scaffold them as they are learning new things. This suggests that the intelligence of children can be measured by what the child can do with the supervision of a parent (skilled help). Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) argued that once these values are internalised, they become inner speech which is different from social speech and plays a role in regulating and controlling behaviour. The study aims to find out how a child who cannot access these learning skills survives his scholastic experience.

Creswell, (2003) viewed children as protagonists meaning that they are competent and full of ideas. This illustrates that the child in his early years at school must not be seen as a *tabularasa*. School education builds upon this Zone of Proximal Development. If the child missed the opportunity of parental involvement as their foundation for learning, they will have permanent scars in their learning process. Delpit (1995) added that in order to engage children in the process of learning and development, we must know who they are and where they come from. Schools enrol children using school registers where they fill in the background information of each learner. This helps to guide scholastic performance and relevant curricular needs.

Vygotsky (1978) argued that knowledgeable people (teacher or parent) are there to impart knowledge domains to the child and develop problem solving skills. These attributes add value to the scholastic performance of the individual learner in the classroom. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) argued that child-parent interaction builds up the mental structure of the child. This contributes to inter-psychological skill which is the ability to socialise with the world and intra-psychological which is the development of the mind.

Informed by a sociocultural perspective, learning occurs through interaction, negotiation, and collaboration. It is evident that the child needs someone he can imitate or have a role model in life in order to look up to. I want to know how these children cope at school where they are expected to engage in a wide range of class activities with other learners.

Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning is a social process, where cultural symbols and signs help to develop concepts as children construct new ideas. The child's interactions and socialization with other individuals in the environment assist in the total human development, especially cognitive development. Learning is contextualised and situated within the child's culture and experiences. New connections are made through mediation, scaffolding and interaction. Language within the child's culture can be used to facilitate learning and cognition (Vygotsky, 1978 in Chaiklin, 2003 and Feldman, 2010).

According to Vygotsky (1978), the idea is to have the students become teachers like myself in close proximity to facilitate and help out with any question. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) fills the gap between a learner's ability to perform a task under adult guidance or with peer collaboration. However, the learner's ability in solving the problem independently precedes learning. The ZPD acts as an arena where the child unpacks his expertise that is nurtured through parental involvement in the child's upbringing. This suggests the idea that the parent plays a crucial role in the scholastic experience of his/ her ward/ child.

Vygotsky (1978) argued that social learning can precede development. He further argued that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter - psychological) and then inside the child (intra - psychological).

Vygotsky (1978) proposed that if we can further cognition through social development and vice versa, we are then preparing children for society, which is far bigger than the walls of education. He proclaimed that before we can reach social preparation, we must first find ways to develop social strategies in our schools. The surroundings can scaffold the child through providing motivation and feedback about progress as the person progresses.

The implication of Vygotsky's theory is that learners should be provided with socially rich environments in which to explore knowledge domains with fellow learners, teachers and parents. As children from child headed families lack the advantage of having a parent who is an important stakeholder in their learning, it baffles me and pushes her to enquire more about their scholastic experience.

3.4 RESILIENCE

What is the scholastic experience of children who come from child headed homes and what are the reasons for such scholastic experience on some of these children who may be exposed to the same life yet end up developing differently in terms of their experience at school.

In most cases it varies with individuals how one manages a certain level of stress in life, and is able to revert from life's adversity to one's normal level of functioning. Masten and Reed (2002) had argued this to be dependent on various factors of which social contexts are a part. They viewed resilience as the ability to "bounce back" from stressful or challenging experiences, such as death of parents and be able to survive and thrive under extreme on-going pressure without acting in dysfunctional ways. It enables one to adapt to changes and approach negative life experiences positively and constructively.

In addition, Masten and Reed (2002) argued that the ability of one's rebound and recovery for those who are able to bounce back, is a result of protective factors; inner capacity and more so resources such as strong self-esteem, good social skills, a sense of purpose in life, self-control, individual factors such as genetics, personality, ethnicity, and social factors such as societal standard of living, supportive caregivers and geographical proximity to others, social and community support such as support from family, friends, community and school.

3.5. CONCLUSION

Issues discussed in this chapter include the theoretical framework to help unpack issues that affect the scholastic experience of children from child headed households. Sociocultural theory helped us to understand issues in child headed households and their effects on the scholastic experiences of these children.

The next chapter outlines the design and methods used to analyse the scholastic experience of learners from child headed families.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the style in which research was designed, focuses on how I systematically collected and analysed the data that was needed to answer the research questions which are:

What are the experiences of children who come from child headed homes?

Why do children who come from child headed homes have such experiences?

In addition, this chapter will explain the involvement of participants and the role they played in this study. Finally this chapter will lay the basis for an in-depth explanation of the methods of data collection, data analysis as well as address the ethical considerations.

4.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study is in an interpretive paradigm that attempts to understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated an effort was made to get inside the person and to understand and describe human nature (Cohen et al, 2007). Furthermore, an interpretive paradigm aims to describe how people make sense of their worlds with the intention to develop a greater understanding of how people make sense of the context in which they live (Cohen and Manion, 2007). This view is also supported by Creswell (2009, p.21).

As a researcher I achieved a better understanding of children from child headed households through interviews and analysis of school records. I made every effort to conduct the interviews in naturally occurring contexts of the learners without being intrusive. This implied that I needed to engage the situation from the viewpoint of the participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, pp. 138-139). The interpretivist paradigm allows flexibility for shaping the research as it develops. My study generally relied on empirical information where human beings (learners) were used to collect evidence.

4.3. CONTEXT AND SAMPLING

The research engaged a qualitative study within an interpretive paradigm. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), qualitative research involves studying things in their natural

settings, by attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Furthermore, Silverman (2001) as well as Ritchie and Lewis (2003), argued that a qualitative study is best suited for exploring issues to gain in-depth understanding of phenomena, which makes it relevant for this study into the everyday life experiences of children in child headed families as well as the implications for their scholastic experience. Within the broad area of qualitative research, this study is a case study of the scholastic experience of learners in a secondary school at Ndwedwe.

The criteria I used for selecting participants for the research are that the offspring had to lose one or both parents in line with the definition of a child headed household provided elsewhere in this dissertation. This was intended to choose a sample which is easy to reach. Therefore, the purposive sampling method was adopted to target learners from child headed households. Purposive sampling means that the researcher makes specific choices about which people to include in the sample. I targeted a specific group to avoid generalisation of results (Yu and Teddlie, 2007). Furthermore, Patton (1990) argued that purposive sampling type is used to select the relevant or certified participants according to the research needs. The data drawn from this sampling was intended to provide as true a reflection as possible of the scholastic experiences of learners from child headed families.

Participants were selected using data that is drawn from the school database which keeps detailed learner information, such as learner medical history and parental information. Furthermore, the marks on the record sheets were reviewed to determine the learner's performance.

In this study, eleven children between 13 years and 22 years of age from grade eight to eleven were selected to participate in this study. I personally approached the participants by inviting them to a briefing informing them about the study which is related to their background. I requested the learners to go with her when meeting the Social Worker for further discussion about the subject. Although the main focus of the study was grade eight, the scholastic experience of grade eight was checked against other grades. Participation was open to every learner since the situation of children from child headed families was common across the whole school. The grade eight learners who were prioritised in the study, withdrew themselves stating various reasons, for example, some became shy, some did not feel

comfortable, some were scared of stigmatisation, others disappeared in the middle of the process and some were absent on the day of the interview.

Eight grade eight learners were invited, however due to the delay in their responses, this prompted me to expand my sample and extend the invitation to other grades since the situation of children from child headed families is prevalent in other grades in our school. The idea to include learners up to grade eleven was ideal because they have a fairly well developed cognitive capacity to give narrations of their life events.

4.4. DATA COLLECTION

The instruments employed to collect data were interviews and analysis of school records. Cohen et al (2007, p. 195) defines triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour. Furthermore, methodological triangulation was selected for the purposes of this study, which facilitates the drawing of comparisons amongst the data, derived from the two data collection methods, i.e. interview and analysis of school records. Each of the two methods had the potential to yield substantially similar results, thereby ensuring reliability, trustworthiness and validity.

4.4.1. Interviews

This is a planned scenario where people meet with the intention to obtain information from each other. Cohen et al (2007, p. 409) cited in Kvale (1996) explain that an interview is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest which is seen as the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production. Questions used for the interviews were open-ended and specific probes were used since they are flexible and useful for gaining in-depth information of people's experiences, perceptions and beliefs. (Ritchie and Lewis 2003) Open-ended questions were asked and this gave the participants the opportunity to express their personal perspectives. In using interviews the children were able to give voice to their interpretation and thoughts. Human beings are also known for being able to make sense of their experience through narrations and the ability to do so develop fairly early and rapidly in children with no training or instruction, therefore making it appropriate for this study (Cohler 1982). Narratives are valuable when dealing with emotional and personal issues and the interviewee is always free to express him/her in the way best known to them. The individual interview sessions lasted thirty minutes with each participant.

The sessions were audio-tape recorded to enable better accuracy. Furthermore, the recorded interview was transferred to a compact disc; two copies were made to be attached at the back of the finished dissertation. All eleven of the interviews were conducted in the local language, isiZulu, since all participants are Zulu speakers living in a rural area.

4.4.2. School Records

Analysis of school records is an instrument used to collect data which I scrutinized and interpreted in order to gain insight of the scholastic experience of learners. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), data analysis helps to bring order, structure and meaning to the data that will be handled by the researcher.

I studied and analysed the documents such as class registers which can tell who is present and who is absent and also provides detailed learner personal information. The class registers are supplied to the schools by the Department of Basic Education wherein the number of learners per class is recorded as well as attendance of learners. The statistic of enrolment of learners for the whole school is recorded. It provides space for recording of the biological details of a child. The information provided in the register allows the teacher to understand the background of the learner.

The Department of Basic Education provides the schools with assessment schedules where the performance of learners is recorded. The test records can tell about the performance of the learners whether there is progress or regress in their scholastic performance. Information contained in the schedules is shared between the school and the Department of Education in order for the Department to monitor how the school operates in order to benefit the community and the country as a whole. I studied and interpreted these assessment schedules to better understand the scholastic achievement of the learners from child headed families. These valuable documents helped me to analyze the attendance of learners as well as their performance in tests and exams.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The methods used were interviews as well as analysis of school records. According to Cohen et al (2007, p. 537) data analysis is a system of making sense of data in terms of the participant's definitions of the situation. They (Cohen et al) add further that the correct way to analyze and present qualitative data is to abide by the issue of fitness for purpose.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed on a compact disc. The recorded interview was listened to several times and the transcripts too were read and re-read to create a context for the meanings and themes. After obtaining some kind of general meaning, these were put into themes. The idea of constructing categories or themes for analysis is supported by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007: 479):

This stage (i.e. constructing the categories) is sometimes termed the creation of ‘domain analysis’. This involves grouping the units into domains, clusters, groups, patterns, themes and coherent sets to form domains.

In trying to analyse data, the study employed content analysis. Content analysis is defined as being what is said in a text, how it is said, and how often it is said (Rugg and Petre, 2007, p.157). Content analysis involves the classification of words or texts into much fewer categories (Cohen et al, 2007; Christensen et al, 2007, Newby, 2010). Using this method has meant that data was categorised according to the themes that emerged. Central in the use of this method was the realisation of similarities and differences in the themes. In addition to the data analysis methods, a triangulation technique has also been used to make sure that relevant data is collected. The data from the interviews were triangulated against the school records (register and assessment schedules). Here I attempted to see if what learners were saying about their scholastic experience matched to the number of days they were present at (or absent from) school and whether kind of scholastic challenges expressed by learners were congruent (or not) with the results they obtained in the final examination schedule.

The learner’s school attendance was scrutinised by extracting the attendance figures from the class register. Since the learners who participated in this study were from different grades and classes, their attendance record was extracted and put into a spread sheet (refer to Table 5.1 in chapter 5). The purpose of summarising the attendance of each learner was to establish if the fact that they are from child headed families had any impact on their school attendance. It is widely believed that scholastic achievement is linked to regular attendance and participation in class activities. The final assessment mark of each learner was also scrutinised and extracted and recorded on a spread sheet (refer to table 5.2 in chapter 5). Here again, the aim was to understand whether the scholastic performance of learners from child headed families is impacted upon or not.

4.6. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness refers to the credibility and validity of qualitative research (Johnson, 1997; Rule & John, 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that trustworthiness provides the opportunity of expressing new ways of validity, reliability and generalizability. They further refined trustworthiness by setting the criteria of: credibility, which addresses issues of fit between respondent's views and the researcher's representations of them. In the current study, trustworthiness was obtained through checks and cross checks, peer debriefing and prolonged engagement. Furthermore information was obtained using mechanically recorded data by means of an audiotape to record interviews verbatim, meaning the transcript would be more accurate than if I simply jotted down notes during the interview. I had to wait for an appropriate time to engage in data collection and come back later asking the same thing in order to get a variety of answers for the same questions which enhanced credibility. The same group of participants was used during different sessions of the interview with the intention of achieving stability and reliability.

4.7. ETHICAL ISSUES

The ethical approval of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the permission to conduct the research was requested by me and granted by both UKZN as well as the Department of Basic Education. Furthermore, a consent letter was sent to the Ward Manager advising him of the intention to conduct research in his Ward about children who come from child headed families in order to understand their scholastic experience. A consent letter was sent to the gatekeeper of the school (school principal) which was used as a research site. Then there was a consent letter sent to the guardians or the local social worker who is a care giver to the child to obtain permission for a child to participate in the study. The final consent letter was issued to the children who volunteered to participate in the interview session. Since the participants (interviewees) were minors, there was a need for me to be accompanied by the local social worker to the interview. This is because the Social Worker is an expert in dealing with children's social life and how to deal with their emotions. An invitation was issued to the social worker to offer a relaxed and conducive environment and be a mediator between myself and the interviewees. Furthermore, learners were invited to a community library, which is about six kilometers away from school, to avoid stigmatization of learners.

All the participants in the research were notified about the study contents and how it will benefit all the stakeholders in the Education field. The respondents were also given the

assurance that measures were in place to protect their identity as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. All information obtained was treated in the strictest confidence and pseudonyms were used to protect the participants as well as their school of origin. All ethical approvals are attached in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 comprising of Annexures A to F. This co-insides with the view of Howe and Moses (1999) as cited by Cohen et al (2007, p. 77), when saying that informed consent is a cornerstone of ethical behaviour as it respects the right of individuals to exert control over their lives and to take decisions for themselves.

The data that is recorded and transferred to the computer will be kept until the study is approved. The findings are documented as well as recorded through a tape recorder and transferred to the compact disc where the voices of the participants will be heard and stored as evidence. The information will be kept in a safe place so that it will not be accessed by unauthorised persons in order to maintain confidentiality. The collected data will be kept for five years, and then destroyed. The safekeeping of my study for five years is to satisfy the University that my study was conducted without prejudice and alteration of some sort. That creates the context within which to investigate the challenges faced by children from child-headed families and their scholastic performance.

4.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter explains the approach to the study and the research design and methodology. The research involved a qualitative study and adopted an interpretive approach and made use of a case study as well as a purposive sampling method. The method of triangulation was employed to collect and validate data. Ethical issues were also addressed in this study.

The following chapter organizes the data collected and presents the findings of the study collected through interviews and analysis of school records.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The central focus of my study was to explore the scholastic experience of learners from child headed families at a secondary school. The study used two data collection instruments namely, interviews and analysis of school records. This chapter focuses on the presentation and discussion of findings.

Data from learner interviews and analysis of school records is discussed together in order to gain insight into the problem of child-headed families. The following is an extract from the learner interviews conducted in conjunction with the social worker. It must be noted that the names used are not learner's real names in order to protect their identity.

The data obtained from the interviews is arranged in three themes in this chapter: personal life of a child, impact on scholastic experience and the child's future dreams.

5.2. PERSONAL LIFE OF A CHILD

5.2.1. Introduction

In the section I introduce some contextual information on the learners who participated in this study. The learner participants were asked where they live and with whom. Two participants indicated that they live with other siblings and an adult aunt or grandmother. Seven participants indicated that they live with other siblings only. Two participants indicated that they live alone. Clearly these participants are from child headed families and they have to take care of their own needs without any adult supervision. Such children's socialisation, self-confidence and education may suffer as according to Pillay & Nesengani (2006, p. 132) children are dependent on parents for socialisation, self-confidence and supervision. In view of the fact that seven participants were not living with their parents, I asked them where their parents were. Six participants indicated that both parents had passed away. Two participants said that their mother passed on but the father lived elsewhere. The remaining three indicated that their parents were living and working elsewhere. This further confirmed that the children were from child-headed homes.

With it now being established that the participants were members of child headed families, they were asked to explain who took care of them in the home environment.

5.2.2. Feeding Ourselves

One participant, Irene, said:

My aunt collects grant (mother's sister) through foster care. We use that money to care for our needs. When I come from school I do everything by myself i.e., cooking etc. The grant money is not enough.

Another participant, Thobza, said:

Aunt looks after us, she is not working, she collects grant for us. She also drinks and sometimes does not come home.

Lyons (2006) referred to this situation when emphasizing that child headed families are prone to increased poverty, poor health and poor nutrition which exacerbate poor school attendance that limits the possibility of a good school experience.

We see that in the case of the above two participants, they rely on their adult aunt who collects grant on their behalf. According to the South African government's 1997 White Paper on Social Development, the existence of widespread poverty in South Africa led to Child Support Grants being introduced as a means of assisting with poverty alleviation programmes. If there is no biological parent, the caregiver must provide proof of their primary caregiver status in order to collect a grant on behalf of the child. The South African government policy is to ensure that each and every South African has food to eat, as well as clothes and shelter.

However, in the case of Thobza, it seems that the aunt uses the money for her own personal gain. This could prove to be detrimental to her future education. This child has no adult to supervise her school attendance and monitor her school performance, since the aunt in whose care she lives, is absent from home at times. According to Evans and Miguel (2007, p. 49) parents are influential in the academic achievement of children. Evans and Miguel (2007, p. 49) argue that the absence of parents results in delayed enrolment, fewer hours at school once enrolled, or drop-out. Furthermore, they state that normal learning requires a parent's push when doing homework, proper wearing of school uniform and participation in other school activities, which may not necessarily be happening in the case of Thobza.

Another participant, Somzi said:

I stay alone since the older brother who stays at home drinks and sometimes fight me, calling me names, telling me that my education is of no concern to him.

Another participant, Bona said:

My mother is doing piece jobs in Durban and only comes during month end or if there is an emergency at home.

Another participant, Aphiwe said:

My father lives in Tongaat, which is far away from home and only comes during month end.

According to the school register, Aphiwe was absent for eleven days in 2013.

The research by Evans and Schamberg (2009, p. 106), revealed that the situation of children from child headed families may affect the psychological wellbeing of a child and may leave an indelible mark on their scholastic experience. This data explains that the child can be passive in the class and have anger because of emotional abuse that the child experiences at home.

Aphiwe and Bona are girl children who live on their own in the absence of their parents. According to Kelly (2002), young girls from child headed families who stay on their own are vulnerable to unsafe sex, and are exposed to the risk of falling pregnant, which may cause them to be sleepy and passive in class and end up performing poorly in class work and fail the exams. In addition to this, Moletsane (2003) mentioned that the impact of death of parents causes children to grow up without adult attention, supervision or love and makes them vulnerable to abuse (physical, emotional and sexual) from other members of the community. The implications for education is that there can be a prevalence of teenage pregnancies among these girls, leading to a high absenteeism rate when the child is sick, or become rude to teachers since they are also involved in adult's play. This may lead to a poor scholastic experience and eventually an end to their education career.

The absence of an adult in the home leads to the question how these children cope on their own. All eleven participants revealed that no one helps them with household chores; it is a burden on their shoulders. For example,

Bona said:

There is no one at home, home chores are waiting for us.

Bona again mentioned that:

It is difficult to live alone. It disturbs my learning as sometimes I have to bunk school in order to look after my young sister.

Another child, Wendy added:

"No one looks after my needs, my grant has been stopped and the social workers are sorting out. My sister is doing piece jobs. When I come from school I come to an empty house and my brother having gone to his friends".

According to Robson & Kanyanta (2007, p. 419) child-headed families are often extremely vulnerable and impoverished which drives them into work and prevents them from attending school, thereby affecting their academic experience. It is clear that when the child stays alone, heading a household, the child faces limited means to satisfy his/her necessities since there is no extra income besides the grant money. This unstable home environment may demotivate the child which affects his/her scholastic performance.

It is true that this comes up with huge responsibilities as Van Breda, (2010) agreed with the Chiastolite study (2008) when contending that, the taking up of new responsibilities and roles was a highly salient theme. Consequently, it is very difficult to act as a parent, a learner and a counsellor all at once to siblings. Furthermore, Chiastolite cited Masondo (2006, p. 36) when arguing that household heads are particularly vulnerable to dropping out of school in order to care for their younger siblings who continue with their education

Somzi added:

No one helps, moreover my brother always quarrel with me that I am not learning for him and won't benefit anything from my education. School keeps me out of things that can destroy my life. I get the grant provided that I am at school. I also get provision from the meals at school since it is aware of my situation.

In the case of Somzi and his brother, there is a sense of bullying. Rigby (2004, p. 69) defined bullying as "a form of aggressive behaviour which is usually hurtful and deliberate". He continued explaining that during bullying is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. It seems this brother is aggrieved by not getting the opportunity for education at his age and by not working at his age, he is feeling annoyed by his younger brother who is still going to

school. There is a sense of competition that since he did not succeed in life, so be it for his younger brother.

The psychological consequences for the brother of Somzi are that he will have symptoms of depression, social isolation, and/or lack of adult support. Boris et al. (2006) in his Rwandan study found that child headed households reported higher levels of depressive symptoms, social isolation, and/or lack of adult support. Venter and Rambau (2011) warn that children left alone for very long hours may present low self-esteem, low academic efficacy and high levels of depression. This trend was noted in the behaviour of Somzi's brother who is full of anger and depressed. The participant may suffer from socioemotional disruption such as being disrespectful to teachers at school causing more problems for him by blaming other people who may give him support that he needs from parents as reported by Boris et al. (2006, p. 598).

The above comment was also confirmed by Atwine, Cantor-Graae & Bajunirwe, (2005, pp. 560-561) who found depression to be higher among child headed households than matched non orphans. Atwine et al (2005, pp. 560-561) as well noted that orphans experienced significantly higher levels of anger than matched non orphans as they experience a feeling of abandonment by parents. Paige and Johnson, (1997, p. 686) highlighted the report by Social workers in the USA concerning vulnerable children who often have behavioural problems at home and at school, as a response to role overload.

It is vital for the teachers to be appraised of the children from child headed families as Inclusive education, as per the Department of Basic Education (2002), advises that in the classroom there are two types of learners. There are those who have future dreams about their career and those who run away from home and family problems. Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education (2002) proclaimed that those without positive intention tend to be disruptive particularly because they cannot cope with the demands of the curriculum. This view is supported by Cluver, Gardner and Kganakga (2007) in their study that showed that some of children find the school a place of hope from distressing home circumstances. The awareness about the above mentioned situation will help in equipping teachers to assist in improving such learner's scholastic performance.

Since the participants live with the community which have their own children of similar age as the participants, I asked the question to find out how the community looks at the participants as they live on their own. Eight participants responded that they do not have a problem with the community.

5.2.3. Community Involvement

However, three participants gave different views, like Bona who said:

The community is not happy for their children to visit us since there are more boys who visit us taking advantage of us staying alone as we are only girls. The community call us names like saying our home is a Jacken house (house of prostitutes), which makes us unhappy as we don't call the boys to come to our house and that makes us feel unhappy. Our mother also becomes very angry. We end up staying in the house and depressed, feeling unwelcome in the society.

Another participant, Small, was somewhat more positive about community's involvement in their life:

The community feels very concerned and feel sorry that our parents have abandoned us. The boys come to our house and stay till late, that compromises the study time. Sometimes we enjoy the company since we are lonely and feel guilty to chase them away.

Thurman et al., (2008:2) confirmed that children from child headed families experience social exclusion, and use the example of his Rwandan study where he found that the children from child headed families felt the rejection by the community. Chiastolite (2008) reported that the children indicated that their communities treated them differently because they are in a child-headed family.

The neighbours where this child lives are not used to the situation of a child headed family. They viewed the child headed family as a result of children who are abandoned by their parents and that is unusual in the community. This idea was confirmed by Jones, (2005, p. 165), when he claimed that there are orphans where the parents are dead as well as orphans where the parents have abandoned their children.

Another participant, Aphiwe said:

The community cares for us like one day some members gave us a hiding for misbehaviour and we stopped suddenly. I stay alone during the day and at night I go to my friend's house. I am aware that the community notices all my moves. I try to avoid any wrongdoings.

Some time ago, the child belonged to the community. Even when the child does wrong things, he gets reprimanded particularly because other children can copy the wrong doing of their peer. According to Oleke et al. (2005, p.2631) traditionally in Africa, children have been regarded as belonging not only to the biological parents, but also to the lineage or kinship group. The customary willingness to help relatives when a calamity strikes, have been culturally deep-seated and implies that families readily welcomed orphans of their relatives.

5.2.4. Peers

Since these children live a strange life where they have a responsibility which is over their age, maybe their thinking level is more matured than their peers due to their independent experience. I needed to find out if these children relate with their peers. I asked the participants how they relate with peers and how their peers in turn treat them. Nine participants responded that they relate very well with their peers, they even mentioned that their peers are accommodative, nice, friendly, supportive, and emphatic towards them. Cluver, Gardner and Kganakga (2007) mentioned that children from child headed homes prefer to be at school for socializing and building of friendships as an important part of educational goals. Two other participants revealed that they get bad treatment from their peers, like Irene who said:

Children at school, sometimes look down upon us as they know that there is no parent to fight for us.

Robson & Kanyanta, (2007), revealed that vulnerable children are being bullied and harassed at school leading to poor performance and dropouts.

Irene continued reporting that:

On Tuesday my school shoes were torn, some learners laughed at me and I have to bunk classes. Currently I am using shoes which are not for school.

This situation is revealed in the study on vulnerable children of ABT Associates Incorporated (2001, p. 32) which tells that some learners are withdrawn from schooling because some children mock them. According to Ayieko (1997), Masondo, (2006 p.50) and Robson &

Kanyanta, (2007, p. 419), when a parent is dying or has died of AIDS, social stigma acts as an additional stumbling block to the continued education of the children some of whom report being bullied, harassed and encounter prejudice at school.

Children have not yet experienced life and tend to laugh even at things they are not supposed to laugh at and need to be taught about certain issues to be aware of.

Another participant, Small, said:

The peers take advantage of us being alone and make us to do things we do not like. That causes a pressure to us. Our mother advises us to be indoors so that we discourage the unwanted visitors who push you to do things you don't want. Whereas peers feel free to visit friends who live on their own without an elder supervision. My peers congratulate me that I stay alone and I can do anything at any time, they don't see any bad side of my situation.

According to Walker, (2002, p. 15), in a study of child-headed families in Zimbabwe, 40% of the children interviewed reported some form of abuse since becoming a child headed household. The forms of abuse included being beaten, being shouted at or called derogatory names by peers and being sexually abused.

The above discussion showed that participants live in poverty and depend on their foster parents to collect grants on their behalf. Others have to live alone whilst their parents live somewhere doing odd jobs. This makes them to have no one to help them with their daily needs such as homework. The community is very welcoming to some of these children however other community members are not happy about these children as they believe they might have a bad influence on their children. Some participants mentioned that they get on very well with their peers and others related bad treatment that they encounter from their peers.

The next theme will further look at whether these children cope with schoolwork which means that the individual bounces back to a previous state of normal functioning using the experience of and exposure to diversity (Rutter, 2004a).

5.3. SCHOLASTIC PERFORMANCE

5.3.1. Introduction

The responses of the participants showed that they care for themselves, since parents are absent from their lives and they do not have a shoulder to cry on when coming home. This confirms that their environment causes hardships even in their personal and educational situation. The children were asked questions relating to their scholastic experience. Eight participants responded that there is no one who helps them with schoolwork whilst they are at home and no one will notice even if they dodge classes. This implies that going to school to them is optional.

5.3.2. A Passion for Learning

Two participants mentioned that they help one another.

Bona and Small said:

We do schoolwork together and we have passion for learning. Furthermore, Bona said:

Sometimes I am absent from school because there is no one to fear.

It is commendable that these children are committed to brighten their future on their own without the guidance of an elder. This view concurs with the idea of Green & Kroger (1999) who stated that cognitive competence in school and other social settings are markers of resiliency and directly contributes to children's ability to achieve high performance levels in school. Since some children like Bona and Small have self-motivation for their schoolwork, this reduces stress on the school because if they do wrong there would be no adult to talk to. This highlights the idea that the educational journey of these learners is self-directed. Even the progress report from the school will be viewed by them and they will take their own decisions.

Another participant, Simayela said:

I do my studies on my own. No one can see whether I went to school since my granny drinks, she comes home and cause disorder, making noise and using vulgar language. Because of my aunt, who lives elsewhere, I respect her and her advice that I must continue with education.

Some children succeed in life despite the circumstances that hinders their progress. Fortston (2007) as well as Evans and Miguel (2007, p. 49) argued that the relationship between the

child and their next of kin (other than the parents) was not as natural as with that of parents themselves and may result in failure to acquire high academic achievement. This demonstrates that Simayela's aunt controls him from a remote distance which may not have a positive effect on his behaviour and future. The granny makes matters worse and has become a burden on Smayela as he has to correct her and understand her habits as well. This may disturb the flow of concentration in his studies.

Another participant, Wendy commented that:

My elder sister motivates me to learn, but it worries me that there is no one who notices about my education. I sometimes don't get someone to collect my progress report at school since reports are being collected by the parents. I end up not knowing whether I have passed or failed.

The school policy attempts to enforce active participation of parents in their children's learning whereby the school requires parents or guardians to collect progress reports for their children. This causes hardships for some children who come from child headed families as they will not know their progress on time like other children. Bronfenbrenner (2004) added that the absence of parents in the child's education promotes a lack of interaction between the family and school.

Another participant, Aphiwe, disclosed that:

My father's concern is to see me passing at the end of the year, without any input during the course of the year as he stays far away from home, only comes home once in a month.

The child may not grow on her own miraculously without closer relationship with her parent or guardian. Instructions only are not enough in the growth path of the child, there must be a close monitoring to see to it that instructions are complied with. According to Boyer (1991, p. 4) parents want their children to succeed in school and in life however social and economic changes make it increasingly difficult for parents to provide the support that children need.

5.3.3. Maintaining a Balance/Imbalance

As a follow up I raised another question as to how the participants structure their duties in order to cope with schoolwork and household chores.

All eleven participants mentioned that they try to structure their duties in order to fit in both with home chores and schoolwork. If they feel tired on that day they go to sleep without doing any schoolwork.

One of the participants Small said:

I usually postpone schoolwork because of work pressures.

Home chores are a burden on their own and needs a person who is dedicated to it. It is not an easy task to mix it with learning. This is supported by Hartell & Chabilall, (2005), when they argued that a work and school role is too hard to carry especially for these children due to their vulnerability and their schoolwork becomes compromised.

Another participant Bona said:

If I feel tired I go to sleep without doing any schoolwork and I know that affects my schoolwork but who cares anyway.

A person in this situation performs without noticing that the time is moving and only realises at the year-end that he has wasted a lot of time. At that time he will find it difficult to catch up with the work load. Jubber (1994, p. 139) argued that when parents are absent in the child's life, it results in distorted family structures change which exposes children to the risk of demotivation and low self-esteem.

Another participant Mampintsha said:

I become very tired to do schoolwork. It is very difficult to be studying in my situation as I also play a parental role to my siblings.

Looking after children is a long program on its own because they need undivided attention. Sometimes the means to satisfy the demands of raising the child are not easily met or available. Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm (2000, p. 317) argued that poverty among children from child headed families affects their mental and physical well-being and scholastic performance since they do not have the required material to fulfil the objectives of school.

5.3.4. Difficulties Experienced

I asked the participants about difficulties they encounter in their school life. Three participants said that they don't see any difficulty in their learning as staying alone has made them stronger. The other eight participants experienced some sort of difficulty in their schooling life like Thobza who said:

Sometimes we go to school without food. I usually eat at school where they give us some meals.

5.3.4.1. Food

Evans and Schamberg (2009, p. 106), argue that child headed families are adversely affected by poverty which affects their memories that ultimately results in greater difficulty to learn than other children.

Another participant, Irene, said:

I try to concentrate during school hours because I know that I won't have another time to go through my work at home. I try to do my homework at school.

Another participant, Mampintsha, said:

Sometimes we go to school without food especially towards month end as the food gets finished. We sometimes sleep without anything to eat.

5.3.4.2. Homework and learning

Nkomo (2006) cited by Pillay and Nesengani (2006, p. 132) states that children depend on their parents for socialisation, self-confidence and education. The situation facing this child forces him/ her to pile up volumes of school activities at the same time. This contributes to improper learning since there is no provision for reflective learning.

Another participant, Simayela, said:

Sometimes when there is nothing, I go to school without food.

Case, Anne, Paxson, and Albeidinger (2004, pp. 483-508), found that the impact of the parent's death on children's schooling affects their socio-economic circumstances as well as causes a lack of motivation which negatively affects their performance at school.

Other participants, Siphoh and Wendy, disclosed that:

I get disturbed in my learning as I have a daily program that I have to attend to and being away from my books. They both revealed that they have divided attention at all times.

Hunter (1990) argued that increased responsibilities over burdens children from child headed families and negatively impacts on their scholastic performance. Furthermore, Evans (2010) in his report agreed with Hunter (1990) when saying that children in Tanzania who are child heading households indicated that their housekeeping responsibilities affect their ability in learning at school. These children have to play the dual role of being a learner at school as well as an adult at home taking care of his/her siblings. This is true given the fact that the responsibilities of home needs enough time on its own separately from educational demands. A healthy mind is needed for education to succeed.

Lyons (2006) emphasized that child headed families are prone to increased poverty, poor health and poor nutrition which exacerbate poor school attendance that limits the possibility of good school performance.

Another participant, Small, said:

I walk a very long distance to school. This makes me to sleep early without looking at the schoolwork. Staying alone make it difficult to get needs on time. There is no one to give advice, appreciate, criticize and complain on my actions.

Mansour and Martin (2009) emphasised parental involvement in children's learning as it positively affects the child's performance in both primary and secondary schools. They mentioned that parental support to children's learning leads to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school.

Another participant, Somzi, said:

I don't fully concentrate on my schoolwork as I have failed twice. I know that I am not enjoying being at school, but it gives me refuge not to be exposed to outside world evils. I don't have patience to study as I always think as to what the next hour is having for me.

Since the participants fight the battle on their own, which sometimes contradicts the learning environment, I wanted to know how the school accommodates the situation. This leads to the question how teachers understand the situation in order for them to work co-operatively. The

United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) (2000) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2003) emphasised that home environmental factors where children grew up has an influence on children's schooling. Some of the participants showed a positive attitude towards school whereas some showed less concern about the school.

Two participants declared that teachers understand their situation, like Irene who said:
Some teachers show concern towards us and they ask me how we are keeping at home, and how is life at home.

Other participants said they make sure that they don't want to be caught at fault so as to be in teacher's good books as Mampintsha said:

I try to do the schoolwork even though I have to do house chores as well.

Wendy tries by all means to avoid a conflict situation and wants her career to be a success. She said:

I normally report to my teacher if I have to go to the social workers. I try by all means to make my learning possible.

Mansour and Martin (2009) commented that schools' organisational strategies to support learning adds to the successes of learners, since parents cannot positively impact on their child's learning.

5.3.4.3. Teachers

Simayela said:

Teachers understand my situation as they sometimes give us some food to take home.

Wood (2009) cited by Foster & Williamson (2000) commented that teachers struggle to balance the already challenging business of teaching and learning with the additional demands imposed by the increased levels of anxiety, limited concentration spans, severe trauma, heightened discrimination and stigma, and increased poverty experienced by learners who are vulnerable. It is a challenge for the teacher to act out a parental role all the time in order to promote an environment conducive to learning.

Two other participants commented that teachers are not aware of their situation, as is indicated below.

Thobza:

Teachers are not aware of my situation. I can be happy if they can become aware and understand me.

According to Crosby, (1993), Leatham, (2008), Lethale, (2008) and Nesengani (2006) children from child headed families have to contend with challenging physical conditions at home such as absence of desks to complete their homework while overcrowded rooms makes it impossible to study. Working cooperatively between teacher and the learner can create a common understanding and positive relationships.

According to another participant, Bona:

The class teacher is aware that we stay on our own. Our parent is not fully involved in our education, like attending the parents meetings. Other teachers do not understand why I don't keep up the due dates of my work and why I am always absent from school, which is due to a lot of pressure at home. Some reprimand me and I have to explain to them my situation and they encourage me to balance school and home situation. Moreover, I do understand why they are against the way I operate. Listening to teachers will help me to complete the school.

The (DoBE) Department of Basic Education (2001) stipulated that all children have a right of access to educational institutions regardless of their socioeconomic background as enshrined in the South African constitution (Chapter 2, Section 29, 1996). The schools have a responsibility to accept and develop children from child headed families so that they are well groomed to be socially responsible human beings. Teachers are the driving agents to advise the children to prioritise their education in order to realise their future careers.

However, Siphoh said:

I accept if I am being corrected by teachers or elders. I accept whatever comes to me. I don't hold any grudges

Aphiwe added:

I try to work very closely with my teachers.

Mansour and Martin (2009) insisted that home and parental factors contribute to the achievement, motivation, develop of positive self-esteem and self-belief. In order to succeed in life children need to allow room for blame and directives to create a better future.

Sometimes it is better to do good so that other people will not notice that you are stuck with a problem.

Furthermore they added that parents have a great influence on the academic achievement of their children. If parents are engaged in child's learning, that will instil a positive attitude in the child towards staff (teachers) and the work of the school. They pointed out that if the child is co-operative he deserves sympathy, but if he takes life for granted, people will not be willing to help.

Somzi commented that:

“Some teachers care less about my situation. Sometime I lose respect to teachers because I have developed a low self-esteem. I can see that annoy the teachers a lot”.

Boris et al. (2006, p. 598) confirmed that a lack of parents in the child's life results in children showing more signs of socio-emotional disruption.

The discussion on children in child headed families' scholastic experience showed that every child is unique. Some participants argued that some teachers understand their situation. Other participants reported that other teachers are not aware of their situation and they as well care less about them. What is common among all participants was that they seek a way out of the situation through schooling despite the absence of parents.

5.4. FUTURE DREAMS

The participants showed that they accepted the situation that they live in, I would like to understand how the participants want to see themselves in the coming years. The question that followed asked participants to highlight their future dreams in order to transform their present situation. All participants have positive ideas about their future. Some wanted to be professionals, some wanted to uplift their communities and resolve problems which lead to the prevalence of child headed families. Those who felt that they feel unsafe wanted to be in the protection services to protect their communities. Others wanted to be lawyers in order to fight for human rights and against abuses as they have experienced the hardships they face when their grant has been stopped. The views from studies led by Moletsane (2003) and Nkomo (2006) indicated that children from child headed families try by all means to cope at school with difficulties confronting them on a daily basis. They try to make sense and find coping mechanisms in the midst of their adversity. In order to fight this battle of

independence at their age, these children realised that they need to stand on their feet and change their world.

In a study in the Free State, Shilubana & Kok, (2005), argued that factors associated with academic success were studying hard and commitment to work, strong values and moral character, accepting their situation and striving to achieve and a network of adults who check up on the children's schoolwork as well as teachers who understood the children's situation and offer to assist. Through learning these children clearly understand that their peers do their utmost in the midst of resource shortages, likewise this seems similar to their experience of having to achieve good from nothing.

This idea is echoed by Leatham, (2006) who argued that most children relied on teachers for support. The responses that participants gave showed that they do not want to see this situation happen in future. They presented their views as follows:

Irene said: *I dream that one day I want to work and support my family. I wish to become a civil engineer.*

Two participants chose to be lawyers but have different reasons like:

Thobza said: *I wish that I continue with my studies as I want to be a lawyer. I like it very much to fight for human rights, more especially to look after children's rights.*

Msholo said: *There is no role model at home. I want to change all that and become a lawyer to care for the community.*

Participants have a vision of a turnaround strategy to overcome the circumstances of living in destitution and poverty.

Both participants have experienced hardships and exploitation hence they do not want the children to face those hardships they have endured. They want to fight for their rights so that they will experience dignity and self-respect. This is similar to the comment made by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2009) when saying the emotional instability among child headed households could be eliminated through schooling, which allows learning and cognition to take place even in difficult life circumstances.

Another two participants chose to join the police because of the harsh experience they have encountered in their lives, like:

Simayela said: *I have many dreams, I wish that all my sibling to live a better life, not to be in poverty trap, I will try when I am not working to help them with school and home chores. They must have no disturbances and must have someone motivating them. I would like to be a police.*

Somzi said: *My dream is to see myself as a trusted somebody who occupies a certain position who is trustworthy. I would like to be a police and be an honourable citizen.*

Siphoh said: *I wish to be an accountant or a police. Whichever comes first that I can be able to afford.*

Both participants felt unnoticed by the community where they grew up, they want to work for the community and be recognised. Mogotlane, Chauke, van Rensburg, Human and Kganakga (2010) in their study on child headed households in developing countries argued that the children from child headed households confirmed instances of disruptions however they were able to survive very difficult circumstances and lived their dreams.

A further two participants wish to be Accountants because they like to study further on what they know they are good at in order to enjoy their future career differently and forget about their experiences:

Mampintsha said: *I hope to finish school and to work to look after the siblings. I wish to be a Chartered Accountant as accounting is my favourite subject.*

Aphiwe said: *I wish to finish school so that I can help my family. I wish to be an accountant.*

Both participants experienced poverty. They realised that to have money helps one to be respected in the society.

However, other participants came up with individual responses which show that they want to change their lives; they presented their views as follows:

Bona said: *My dream to change the situation of not having a father figure in my life and no mother who is taking care of home life, I wish to finish school and work closer to home to be able to share and help on the challenges that faces my family. I would like that my children have all the necessities and may be have a helper so that they will only concentrate on learning. I have experienced an unsafe life as people steal, get into our house whilst sleeping and there is no one to protect us. Our life is stressful.*

The participant developed appreciation of having a family and wanted a situation where she will see herself contributing to a child headed family

Wendy said: *My older siblings are not at school. They dropped off since education is not guarded by anyone else. I dream to be a social worker.*

The participant realised that guidance is the key to the future. The scars of not growing up under the shelter of a unified family structure have made her realise the importance of having family. She wants to be the mother of the society and help people to heal these wounds.

Small said: *I wish to finish school at a scheduled time and I see myself in the future studying Media and broadcasting. I hate being a failure and engaging in doing wrong activities. Being asked by teachers as to how I cope encourages me and forgets about my situation.*

The participant wants to be a sociable somebody who will entertain the nation. His intention is to bridge the gap of his upbringing with that of adulthood.

5.5. ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL RECORDS

When I perused documents like the class register, it revealed that some learners have lost both parents, some were abandoned and were left to the care of their grandmothers: they do not even know their parents. Grandmothers are very old and some have died, leaving the grandchildren behind. Some learners live on their own since parents are away because of work. Moreover, I viewed the mark sheets in order to check the scholastic performance of the children from child-headed families. It became evident that there were slight differences in the scholastic performance between children from child-headed families and children from stable homes. What also emerged from the review of registers was awareness that learners from child-headed families are a common phenomenon in my school.

The table (5.1) on the next page presents the attendance record of the learner participants in this study.

TABLE 5.1: ATTENDANCE RECORD FOR 2013 OF ELEVEN PARTICIPANTS

#	Name of the participant	Grade	Total number of school days	Total number of days present	Total number of days absent
1	Somzi	9	205	199	06
2	Wendy	9	205	200	05
3	Irene	9	205	195	10
4	Bona	10	205	192	13
5	Simayela	10	205	199	06
6	Thobza	10	205	199	06
7	Small	11	205	192	13
8	Msholo	11	205	205	00
9	Aphiwe	11	205	194	11
10	Mampintsha	11	205	202	03
11	Siphoh	11	205	200	05

The table (5.1) above shows attendance records of the eleven participants in the study. The table simply explains the number of school days in 2013. It identifies the number of days these participants were absent at school versus number of days that they were present. The table is categorised as name of participants, the grades which they attend, total number of schooldays, the number of days these participants were present at school as well as the number of days they were absent from school. This is to clarify that there is no difference in school attendance of learners from child headed families and learners from families where there are both parents. It is clear that there is one participant from a child headed household who was never been absent from school even for a single day in the whole year. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning is largely controlled by the environment and children can remember something only if it has been repeated many times. Furthermore, the child's development is the result of interaction between children and their social environment that includes people (parents, teachers, playmates or school mates, brothers and sisters). A lack of social interaction in the child's life makes the child take for granted everything around her even that which affects his/her future. If the school can communicate rules and

regulations properly to the children and be supported by parents, the child will value the importance of education in his/her life. The child will realise her presence at school as a break through to a brighter future.

Table 5.2 below shows the examination results of the learners who were in grade 10 or 11 in 2013.

TABLE 5.2: PROGRESS ANALYSIS – FET PHASE RECORD FOR 2013 OF PARTICIPANTS

#	Name of the participant	Grade	Year	IsiZulu (Home)	English (FAL)	Mathematics	Life Orientation	Accounting	Geography	History	Life Science	Tourism	Business Studies	Economics	Result
1	Bona	10	2013	260	231	72	132		156		212	200			P
		9	2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Simayela	10	2013	240	90	40	192		124		188	124			NP
		9	2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Thobza	10	2013	212	66	52	152		148	124	164				NP
		9	2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Small	11	2013	248	180	60	260	120					244	144	P
		10	2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Msholo	11	2013	220	45	92	188		164	108		184			NP
		10	2012	48	14	34	35		41	31		45			A
6	Aphiwe	11	2013	200	54	120	192	120					176	84	NP
		10	2012	52	30	24	42	30					55	41	A
7	Mampintsha	11	2013	168	51	100	160	124					164	96	NP
		11	2012	36	19	30	48	57					41	24	NA
8	Siphoh	11	2013	248	69	120	204	120					264	120	P
		10	2012	76	40	40	52	33					71	59	A

Key:

NB: A=Achieved, P = Progress, NP = Not ready to Progress, C = Condoned

The progress table shown above is analysed and final results are written using symbols such as:-

A=Achieved/ P = Progressed for the learners who have passed. NP = Not ready to Progress, this means that the learner cannot proceed to the next grade as he/she has failed the examination for a particular year. C = Condoned, means that the learner's marks were not good but is promoted to the next grade due to repeating the phase more than once or is over age for that class.

The table (5.2) above shows scholastic progress of the eight participants. These participants are in the Further Education and Training band of school. It is necessary for me to try to understand the scholastic performance of the participants by comparing year 2012 and 2013 results.

Bona was in grade 9 in 2012 from another school, she joined the current school (research site) in 2013. She showed great potential despite being a child from a child headed household and produced good results. Smayela and Thobza were in grade nine in 2012 and obtained good results, however both of them failed grade 10 in 2013. They are not consistent in their learning. Small was in grade 10 in 2012 from another school and she joined the current school (research site) in 2013. She showed great potential despite being a child from child headed household and produced good results. Msholo and Aphiwe passed in grade 10 in 2012 and did not pass in 2013 which shows unstable learning in both participants. Siphoh achieved good results in both years. However Mampintsha failed for both years. These results obtained by Siphoh and Mampintsha show that there are learners who are resilient and those who succumb to the situation.

I present in table 5.3 below the results of learners were in grade 9 in 2013.

TABLE 5.3: PROGRESS ANALYSIS –GET PHASE RECORD FOR 2013 OF PARTICIPANTS

#	Name of the participant	Grade	Year	IsiZulu (Home)	English (FAL)	Mathematics	Life Orientation	Natural science	Social Science	Economics & Management Sciences	Technology	Arts & Culture Science	Result
1	Somzi	9	2013	53	21	47	35	27	33	28	30	32	NP
		9	2012	33	16	02	60	40	41	16	36	36	NA
2	Wendy	9	2013	63	31	27	38	55	48	35	32	45	NP
		8	2012	78	61	43	75	56	21	75	57	63	A
3	Irene	9	2013	65	38	40	59	54	52	50	41	46	P
		8	2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Smayela	9	2012	61	41	10	63	40	40	65	68	54	C
5	Thobza	9	2012	59	30	36	67	52	44	69	48	14	C

Key:

NB: A=Achieved, P = Progressed, NP = Not ready to Progress, C = Condoned

Irene was in grade 8 in 2012 from other school, she joined the current school (research site) in 2013. She showed great potential despite being a child from a child headed household and

produced good results. Wendy obtained good results in 2012, but could not make it in 2013 when her mother died and her father was arrested for her mother's death. She could not cope with her mother's death. Somzi has failed both in 2012 and 2013, he even mentioned in the one-on-one interview that he found the school a refuge protecting him from being viewed as a criminal by the society and also keeping him from being involved in crime, he added that he has no interest in learning. Smayela and Thobza managed to progress from grade 9 in 2012 and could not cope in grade 10. The more the volume of schoolwork increases combined with their stress at home, the more they could not cope with schoolwork.

There seems to be a discrepancy between what is in the registers and what I have observed at the school. Since I am a teacher at the school I am aware that the participants are absent more often, yet this is not reflected in the registers. It seems as though the teachers of these learners are not accurate in recording their absence. Therefore, the statistics provided is not necessarily providing a true account of the participant's absence however the interpretation of the absentee statistics has to be based on hard facts and not on perception. I have therefore commented on the statistics provided and not on my observations of absenteeism by the participants.

In the table 5.1 shown on page 56, the number of days that each participant was absent in 2013 is indicated. It is interesting to note that one child; Msholo was not absent a single day in 2013. This is commendable considering that Msholo does not have a mother and his father lives far away and only comes at month end. He lives with his older sister who has finished school but is not working. What is noticeable with Msholo is that he is a respectful child to his sister. When we look at the performance of Msholo in 2012, we find that he obtained good marks, and progressed to grade eleven; however, in 2013 he did not pass. Seemingly this fluctuation of results may be due to the fact that his sister cannot play a parental role to her brother like checking his schoolwork on a daily basis, visiting school timely to check Msholo's progress. This resulted in Msholo learning in a relaxed atmosphere since there is no pressure behind him. This is borne out when Pillay and Nesengani (2006, p. 132) argue that children are dependent upon parents for socialisation, self-confidence and education. The absence of parental involvement leaves the child to contend with household chores and look after his/her siblings.

Bona and Small live alone in their mother's house because she stays far away from them. Both have been absent for thirteen days in 2013. They are new to the school. Their progress is very promising as both of them have achieved good results and even in the tasks that are given to them they produce sterling results. It is evident that inspiration must come from within. This co-incides with the views of Moletsane (2003) and Nkomo (2006) when they argue that children from child headed households try by all means to cope at school with difficulties confronting them on a daily basis. They try to make sense and find coping mechanisms in the midst of their adversity.

Somzi has been absent from school for thirteen days and has failed for two successive years. He stays at home with his brother who drinks and swears at him when he is drunk. Both his parents have died and there is no mutual respect between him and his brother. Cluver, Gardner and Kganakga (2007) mentioned that children from child headed homes prefer to be at school for socializing and the building of friendship as an important part of educational goals.

Wendy has been absent for five days. She has managed to pass grade eight in 2012 and progressed to grade nine, however she failed on her first attempt at grade nine in 2013. She is faced with a dilemma as she has lost both her parents and the aunt who took care of her was violently killed by her husband in front of her, leaving her with no one to look up to. She has to look after her siblings when her sister looks for odd jobs to keep the family alive. This is an unfortunate situation since according to Malinga (2002) difficulties of caring for children in the household tend to fall on girl children, resulting in psychological problems and poor scholastic performance.

Irene has been absent from school for ten days and has been able to pass during her first year at a new school. Both her parents have died and there is no one who cares whether she goes to school or not and she has to take care of her siblings. Victor (2003), in his study on supporting resilience of children and youth, identified factors that contribute to the resilience of children such as children's ability to solve problems and being sociable.

Smayela was condoned in grade nine but failed his grade 10. He has been absent for six days. Both his parents have died and he has to look after his siblings and was left in the care of their grandmother who drinks and come home drunk and swears at him and the little ones.

There is no one who cares about his education. According to Sengendo and Nambi (1997, p. 115) emotional difficulty in dealing with the death of parents, affects school performance of the children.

Thobza have been absent for six days and was condoned in grade nine but unfortunately could not pass in grade ten. Both her parents have died and there is no one to motivate her to study and learn. Case, Anne, Paxson, and Albeidinger (2004, pp. 483-508), agree that the impact of the parent's death on children's schooling impacts on the socio-economic circumstances as well as a lack of motivation which negatively affects their performance at school.

Aphiwe has been absent for eleven days. Although she passed grade ten, she failed in grade eleven. She stays alone as her mother died when she was young, her sister is married and her father lives somewhere else leaving her to stay on her own. She decides to go to school on her own accord as her father is less concerned about schooling. A study by Victor (2003) described resilience by mentioning that children can overcome challenges and even dangerous situations and become caring, competent and confident.

The participants performed differently to what I envisaged as I thought the learners will be worse off than other learners in the school. Some have suffered the consequences of not having a parent to look after them and as a result did not progress (pass) whilst others showed resilience and progressed (passed) to the next grades. Furthermore, I noted that the absenteeism rate among some participants was particularly high although others showed a remarkably regular school attendance record.

5.6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that eight of the learners who were interviewed, live at a distance of more than ten kilometers from the school. This makes up to seventy three percent of the participants'. Among the participants Siphoh, Mampintsha, Bona and Irene were the eldest in their respective families. This represented thirty six percent of respondents. Mostly, there is an average of three to four children per household. Some male participants revealed that they look after younger siblings. As a researcher I understood that if a younger sibling is looked after by a boy, it is a more traumatic experience for a boy than for a girl. This is because boys are not usually familiar with feminine duties such as child- rearing and babysitting. Ayieko,

M. A. (1989) commented that boys and girls are unique physically, emotionally and intellectually. Boys enjoy competition and as they grow they prefer to keep even close friends at a distance in an effort to appear tough and powerful. Girls prefer cooperation and having close friends with whom they can share their intimate thoughts and feelings. Nowadays even the society is more suspicious if the boy stays alone with a baby girl due to the prevalence of child rape. According to data drawn from the study, each participant has a unique experience. All these children's experiences collected from the interview look similar, they face financial constraints, they may have reason not to come to school and that will reflect badly on their scholastic performance.

5.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on three themes, i.e. the Personal life of a child, their Scholastic performance as well as the children's dreams about their Future. It is indeed clear that the children from child headed households on many occasions live on their own as parents are either dead or working far away from home leaving them to look after themselves. In most cases the children live in poverty and depend on government grants. The communities around them are accommodative although sometimes these children felt as if they are not wanted. What make matters worse are peers who look down upon them and also un-accommodative teachers. However, the participants indicated that they have hope even though they are faced with the difficulties of poverty and hunger. These hardships motivate them to work harder at school as all participants have dreams to become responsible adults.

Finally, I was able to gather information through analysis of school records as well as interviews with the participants. The gathered information made it possible for me to analyze the data and make recommendations.

The next chapter will discuss the recommendations arising from the findings of the experiences of children from child-headed households and their scholastic performance.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In chapter 5, I explained that the learners from Sunshine Secondary School who participated in this study are from child headed families. This is evidenced by the fact that all eleven learners have limited or no adult supervision at home.

Data collected, analysed and tabulated was thematically discussed in Chapter 5 in an effort to paint the picture about the scholastic experience of children from child headed households (Tesch 1990, in Creswell, 2002). This chapter will be summarising each chapter in which the theorization of the dissertation events were guided by the research questions asked:

What are the experiences of children who come from child headed homes?

Why do children who come from child headed homes have these experiences?

The children's voices in this study aided in illuminating the plight of the children from child headed families who faced many difficult life circumstances that seemed to be exacerbated by instances of poverty, huge responsibility and need deprivation. For purposes of data triangulation and authenticating findings from the eleven participants who were purposively selected to participate in the study, the services of an independent social worker was sourced to give guidance and moral support when needed.

6.2. WHAT IS THE SCHOLASTIC EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN WHO COME FROM CHILD HEADED HOMES AND WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR SUCH SCHOLASTIC EXPERIENCE?

It can be said that the scholastic experience of children from child headed households is varied. The study has shown that while some experience difficulty in coping with scholastic activities and home life, others have displayed resilience, and have coped quite admirably. This goes without saying that a child is a child irrespective as to what kind of background she/he comes from. . Every child is unique. However, this study has raised quite a significant number of issues pertaining to how children from child headed households are able to cope with their situation so that it has a minimal effect on the scholastic experience of these learners. A lot still has to be done in order to empower the children from child headed

households in South Africa. The results of this study are not exhaustive but may just be the tip of the ice-berg on the plight of children from child headed households in their scholastic experience. Therefore, there is a need for more in depth studies on the topical issue

6.3. IMPLICATIONS

One implication that arises from this study is that foster grant should be a special consideration to children from child headed families. I believe that once learners from child headed families are taken care of financially, they stand a chance to perform far better in school activities. Arising out my interactions with the learners, I feel that the establishment awareness programs of child headed families at school so that other learners as well as teachers will be aware of the dire situation that these children find themselves in.

I concur with Louw et al (2001. p. 31) who indicate that support groups can be formed in schools for learners who have lost their parents and workshops should be organised with staff in order to teach them to help orphaned learners cope. Accordingly, care and support programmes for children from child headed families in schools, could enable orphaned learners to cope with their difficult circumstances.

I am also in agreement with Makiwane (2001) who argues that the enhancing of resiliency in child headed families can be supported by activities like family visits, child support groups through peer groups and establishing the methodology of memory boxes wherein the child's developmental processes and life's events are recorded and kept for future reference.

6.4. LIMITATIONS

As is the case in many qualitative case studies, this study carried minimal limitations that may not be a threat to the credibility of this research. The careful planning right from the onset of this study, affords this study its worthiness in adding on to the existing body of knowledge on the effects on the cognition and learning, of children from child headed families. The circumstances of these children will have a negative effect on their scholastic experience. I have endeavoured to approach the research process without any bias. I have done this through the inclusion of a social worker during the interviews with learners. Even though some assurances on strict confidentiality had been promised to the participants involved in the study, it was not easy to ascertain how much confidentiality would prevail among the eleven participants since the participants involved in the interview were school

children. Since this a small case study, the results cannot be generalised to other learners from child headed families elsewhere in South Africa.

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