

**FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN**

BY

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree Master of Arts in Psychology has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

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Date

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Lydia Ngwamba and my late father Signet Mbatsane.

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Foremost, I would like to thank God for the strength to carry on; if it was not by God's grace this study would not materialize.

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Abstract

This study investigated the association between family structure and both academic outcome and psychological well-being among learners (N = 500) from the Nkomazi Municipality, Mpumalanga. The learners were classified into six family structure types, including traditional, two-biological parents, single mother, single father, blended, grandparent-led and sibling-led types. The results regarding the association between family structure and academic outcomes were equivocal; chi-square analysis showed that there was no association between family structure and the overall mid-year examination results (“pass” or “fail”) and the learners qualitative self-rating ($p > 0.05$); yet the overall symbol obtained for the mid-year examinations was related to family structure ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, an association was found between family structure and both self-esteem and positive affect ($p < 0.05$), and the relationship between family structure and psychological distress, life satisfaction and negative affect, all measures of psychological well-being did not achieve statistical significance. Possible reasons for lack of association between family structure and some variables of academic performance and psychological well-being variables used in this study are explored.

Keywords: family structure, academic outcome, psychological well-being

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	=	Affect Balance Scale
ABS-PA	=	Affect Balance Scale Positive Affect
ABS-NA	=	Affect Balance Scale Negative Affect
GHQ-12	=	Twelve-item General Health Questionnaire
GST	=	General Systems Theory
RSES	=	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
SWLS	=	Satisfaction with Life Scale

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a society undergoing rapid social, political and economic transformation since the collapse of *Apartheid* in 1994 (Sibanda, 2004). *Apartheid* legislation had powerful and long-lasting effects on family structure in South Africa, particularly for Africans. Under the *Apartheid regime*, South African natives were constrained to quasi-independent “homelands” and allocated to newly formed, so-called, Bantu relocations, with severe restrictions on their ability to travel or find work (Jones, 1993; Reynolds, 1989). Natives living in cities within South Africa’s plateau were limited to townships, small ghettos that generally had inferior housing, utilities, public facilities, and so on (Jones, 1993; Younge, 1982). The *Apartheid* system was instituted and supported by the government dominated by the National Party and entrenched by a number of laws, including the “Group Areas Act”, “Segregation Act”, and so on.

Apartheid legislation contributed to a shift to increased complexity in household organization amongst black people (Jones, 1998; Niehaus, 1994; Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1992; Van der Vleit, 1991). Migratory labour patterns also meant that one or both of a child’s parents were often not present for much of the year, even if they were considered to be current members of the household (Case & Deaton, 1998; Reynolds, 1984; Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998), and many households came to depend heavily on financial remittances sent in from family members employed elsewhere as circulatory migrant labourers in the mines and domestic workers in White homes (Posel, 2001; Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson, 1996).

In part, due to the circulatory migratory labour system, dysfunctional and unstable families, divorce and non-marital births increased greatly for Africans during the *Apartheid* era (Burman & Fuchs, 1986; Burman & Van der Spuy, 1996). The migratory labour system had adverse effects on the wellbeing of families.

Single parents, predominantly mothers, relied increasingly on family members other than spousal support for the household economy and with the raising of children (Niehaus, 1994; Preston-Whyte, 1993).

Lack of economic resources for mothers also gave rise to child fostering, since biological parents who were not allowed to stay as a family unit in their workplaces were forced apart (Gordon & Spiegel, 1993). The impact and extent of harm which was brought by the migrant labour system to the welfare of families during that time is not yet fully understood. Family structures and living arrangements have been undergoing dramatic changes in South Africa for a number of years (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). This drift has been escalated by the effects of modernization as well as industrialisation. In the olden days African families would grow together with both parents present at all times. Parents would make their living through ploughing and keeping livestock.

There were no mines, firms and industries. The introduction of alternative systems of economic organization had an effect on the survival and wellbeing of the family unit. What is known from other countries is that, there is an inverse relation between family structure, family survival and family well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Experience from other countries shows that the family institution is changing from what it used to be. In 1970, 85% of all children in the US lived with two parents, and in 1994 this figure had dropped to 69% (US Bureau of the Census, 1996). Understanding this development is important, because family structure is the major key element among many other factors that play a role in children's growth and security. In fact, there are empirical suggestions of a causal link between family structure and children's growth and wellbeing (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Lichter & Crowley, 2004). For instance, numerous studies have shown that children who grow up in single-parent families are less likely to complete high school or to attend university, than children who grow up in a family that has both parents (Coleman 1988; McLanahan, 1985).

Empirical evidence suggests that children who live in single-parent families tend to perform more poorly in academic evaluations (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Most of the studies of family structure and developmental outcomes have been conducted in the West. It is not clear whether the results from those countries apply to the South African context, due to its geographical and political demographics (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

From a social stratification perspective, South Africa offers a very different social, economic and political context, as compared to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, let alone the West - although the situation may be changing since South Africa's democratic dispensation in 1994 (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Sibanda, 2004).

The present study attempts to find out whether factors such as female headship of households have any bearing on children's schooling, as evidence from Western countries such as the United States seems to suggest is the case (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Comparing children's educational outcomes in South Africa with findings from other countries may not lead to similar conclusions. South Africa has a history of a racially based education system and marginalising policies that influenced schooling opportunities differently at an individual level, community level, and national level (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

1.2.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In overseas research, social structure has been associated with a number of outcomes, including school performance and psychological well-being. It is generally believed that children who come from broken families (e.g. families of divorce or separation, single-parent and no-parent families), will most likely show poor school performance and poor health (Amato & Keith, 1991).

South African families, especially in rural areas, have historically been affected considerably through processes such as the labour migrant system. These processes are related to the reshaping of family structure. Recently, death through the HIV-AIDS pandemic has also contributed to reshaping families through loss of parental guidance and increasing orphan statistics (*Committee on the rights of the child, General comment NO.3, HIV/AIDS and the right of the child, U.N. DOC. CRC/GC/2003/3.*)

These processes are related to how and where children will be brought up (Popenoe, 1996). For instance, the labour migrant system and HIV-AIDS-related deaths can both be associated with single-parenthood and orphaned children being cared for in grandparents-led or extended families. The historical overview of families in South Africa reveals that significant changes over the years, brought about by globalization and modernization, have contributed to a transformation of the family structure and family relations (Amoateng, Richter, Makiwane, & Rama, 2004). Currently, the South African family is simultaneously impacted upon by a number of social factors which include traditionalism, modernity, and post-modernism. In addition, urban-rural migration and more recently, the AIDS pandemic have impacted greatly on the South African family (Amoateng et.al., 2004).

By extension, we may also be interested in what the impact of the present family structure is on well-being and schooling outcomes.

1.2.2 NEED FOR THE STUDY

Family structure is a useful concept to study. Studies have shown that family structure is related to concepts such as academic achievement, progress and security. In this study, this researcher's interest is studying family structure in relation to academic achievement and psychological welfare in a South African context.

It is important to study family structure in South Africa, because the family was one of many institutions in the African community that was and still is drastically affected by colonialism and *Apartheid*.

The effects of *Apartheid* policies that militated against black people's family as an institution can still be felt long after the *Apartheid* system was dismantled. The present study of family structure contributes to the area of study, because it adds an African dimension. It also helps to provide further empirical findings on the relationship between family structure and the two outcomes of academic achievement and psychological well-being.

1.3 **AIM OF THE STUDY**

The study aims to assess how family structure is related to both academic performance and psychological well-being of children, as individuals, within the South African context.

1.4 **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of this research is to investigate the association of family structure with scholastic performance and psychological well-being of African learners.

1.5 **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1.5.1 What is the effect of family structure on academic performance?

1.5.2 What is the nature of the relationship between family structure and psychological well-being?

1.6 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

- 1.6.1 **Family structure:** Family structure is sometimes used in the literature to refer to family processes. For instance types of family processes may include cohesiveness, enmeshment and disengagement, as identified by Sturge-Apple, Davies and Cummings (2010). In this study, family structure refers to the number and/or roles of people that make up a family. Depending on how a family is structured, especially in terms of the parental figures, a family is classified into any of the family structures that include mother-led, father-led, grandparent-led, child-led, blended, and extended families.
- 1.6.2 **Psychological well-being:** It refers to a positive or negative feeling towards life. In the case of positive feeling, it implies possession of the ability to manage negative situations and emotions, and generally experiencing heightened self-esteem. In the present study, established scales are used to measure psychological well-being, and they include the Affect Balance Scale (ABS; Bradburn, 1969), General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12; Goldberg & Williams, 1988), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Graffin, 1985).
- 1.6.3 **School Performance:** School performance refers to school-attendance outcomes, such as performance on standard cognitive tests, year-end school results, and similar measures of scholastic achievement. The present study emphasizes end-of-term school results, including the learners' overall ratings.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the theoretical framework that will guide the study, and then proceeds to review available literature pertaining to the relationship between family structure and academic performance and psychological wellbeing.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROPOSED STUDY

This study is empirical, in that it uses a common concept such as family structure to investigate a social problem. Family structure is an established concept, referring to the composition of the family. Examples of types of family structure include biological parents, consisting of the birth mother and father, blended family, where one of the parents is not the biological parent; and a sibling-led type, where siblings are on their own without any parents or adults. Although this study uses an empirical concept, which is not unique to any theoretical perspective, it nevertheless is indirectly influenced by Von Bertalanffy's (1968) General Systems Model (GSM). In the GSM the individual is seen as a sub-system belonging to a larger system of the family. Although the study is limited to a single level of the said system, it nevertheless falls within the frame of a systems approach. The GSM, together with Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Models (ESM), were used as perspectives to refer to in this study's investigation of the relationship between family structure and both academic performance and psychological wellbeing.

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theory in particular, points out that the environment's layers, five in total (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macro system, including the time-oriented chronosystem [Berk, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1995]), interact in complex ways to both affect and be affected by the person's development.

Focusing on a single level, like this study is doing, is based on the understanding the interaction of that single system with the rest of the systems in the larger environment, is nevertheless considered a complicated process. For instance, changes or conflict in any one layer will flow across the layers. A change in the family circumstance, caused by marriage or separation, affects the life conditions of the child generally. That act alone can determine whether a child continues to study at a particular school, has access to all parents, eats the same food and eats the same quantities, and remains happy in life (Addison, 1992). To take the argument further, that act may determine if a child will perform better or worse at school, and whether he will enjoy a better state of psychological well-being or not.

The general systems and ecological theories are of relevance as a guiding framework for this study. The study is concerned with the interaction of systems, in this case, the relationship between a child and his family as systems. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that the theories themselves are not directly tested.

2.3 FAMILY STRUCTURE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Research consistently shows that children living in single parent families have lower test scores and school grades, poor school attendance, and low educational aspirations (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Mulkey, Crain & Harrington, 1992; Ram & Hou, 2003). Numerous studies have reported that the composition of the family may be one source of children's school performance. For example: growing up in a single-parent or reconstituted family; or living with a divorced parent has been shown to be a significant risk, leading to school maladjustment and achievement problems (Demo & Acock, 1996; Downey, 1995; Featherstone, Cundick & Jensen, 1992; Mulkey, Crain & Harrington, 1992).

Research further points out that family structure also has implications for later educational attainment: young adults from single parent families are more likely to drop out of school or be idle, and attain fewer total years of education (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995).

There is increasing evidence that change in childhood living arrangements is linked to the unfolding adult life course and to the life chances of children (Aquilino, 1991). The economic theory views educational attainment of children as a function of household production and parental investment (Becker, 1975, 1981; Bryant, 1990; Parish & Willis, 1993). Living within a step-parent family is less detrimental to educational attainment than living within a single parent family, and perhaps at times less beneficial than living with both biological parents. Although children in step-families have two parents, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) insist that stepfamilies can be viewed as similar to single-parent families, because children in both types of families live with only one biological parent.

As the proportion of families headed by single mothers continues to grow, researchers and policymakers have expressed growing concern about the social, economic, and psychological conditions in these households. Among the negative effects of single-parent arrangements is the substantial adverse economic impact on children (Farley & Allen, 1987; Garrett et al., 1994; Jaynes & Williams, 1989; McLanahan, 1985), which appear prominent in rural areas (Eggebeen & Lichter, 1991; Lichter & Eggebeen, 1992, 1993). Female-headed households have a high risk of poverty, unemployment, and poor physical and mental health (Danziger & Plotnick, 1981).

The effects of family structure may vary with the age of the child, and subsequently be informed by needs and availability of economic resources. Van der Gaag and Smolensky (1982) found that children require greater economic resources as they grow older.

In the economic theory, the effect of a change in family structure on educational attainment is inconclusive. Educational attainment may be affected either positively or negatively as structural changes affect available resources. Transitions to single-parent, step-parent, and non-parental living arrangements have been linked to lower academic performance and behavioural problems (Thompson, et al., 1994; Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn & Morgan, 1987), lower probability of high school completion (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), earlier movement toward residential independence (Aquilino, 1991), earlier marriage and cohabitation (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988; Michael & Tuma, 1985), and an increased likelihood of adolescent childbearing (Wu & Martinson, 1993). This is consistent with research suggesting that the transition to a stepfamily is difficult for both parents and children (Furstenberg, 1987) and with the contention that many step-parents remain uninvolved in the lives of their stepchildren (Thompson et al., 1992).

The literature suggests that alternative (non-traditional) family structures have a detrimental effect on the educational accomplishments of children living in these. The socialization perspective on the effects of family structure emphasizes the importance of having two parents rather than one for the adequate support, supervision, and control of children (Haurin, 1992; Thompson et al., 1992; Wu & Martinson, 1993). Socialization and economic models offer conceptual models relating to family structure's effect on educational attainment of children (Becker, 1975, 1981; Bryant, 1990; Keith & Finlay, 1988; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988; Perish & Willis, 1993; Sandefur et al., 1989).

Socialization theory considers educational attainment to be a consequence of parental ability to provide children with the motivation and skills necessary for school achievement. Children living with only one parent are also subject to different steps than children in two parent households. This may reduce direct supervision, undermine parental control, and handicap the ability to function in institutions that are fundamentally hierarchical, such as education (Coleman, 1988; Nock, 1988; Weiss, 1979).

McLanahan (1985), using a socialization framework, argues that the stress of changing family structure negatively affects educational attainment of children. The results of educational attainment for children also provide partial support for the socialization hypothesis concerning educational advantages for children of the two-parent family (Astone & Upchurch, 1994; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Thomson et al., 1994). Living with two biological parents had a very large positive impact on high school completion, which is a critical factor for economic wellbeing over the course of adulthood. Single parents are more likely to experience role overload and have less time and energy for supervising children than parents in two-parent families (Thompson et al., 1992).

Living in a single-parent family has been linked to an increased risk for children of dropping out of high school and lower probability of obtaining post-secondary education. Another reason children from single-parent families are less likely to finish high school is the precarious economic position of their families. Mother-only families are more likely, compared to other types of family structures, to be poor (Garfinkes & McLanahan, 1986), and their poverty is more extreme than those of other groups (Bane & Ellwood, 1983). Children of single parents often experience deficits in family income and parental time, supervision, and encouragement - resources that influence their ability to succeed in school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Astone & Upchurch, 1994; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Sandefur, McLanahan & Wojtkiewicz, 1992).

Children living without any biological parents are likely to be doubly disadvantaged, although evidence is mixed (Solomon & Marx, 1995). Some studies addressed the effect of family structure on education where it was noted that the health effects of the single-parent family structure apparently extend across the life cycle. In their study of birth outcome, Ramsey et al. (1986), found that women who live alone are at risk of having a low-birth weight baby.

Various socio-economic conditions of the family, such as low levels of parental education, socio-economic status and family income, have been found to be related to children's underachievement at school (Bianchi, 1984; Chalip & Stigler, 1986; Gustafson, 1994; Lee-Corbin & Evans, 1996; Lorsbach & Frymier, 1992; Murray & Sandqvist, 1990; Norman & Breznitz, 1992; Pandey, 1984; Ricciuti, 1999; Spreen, 1988).

Numerous researchers found that a person's race is strongly related to most of these measures of family, even across socio-economic status (SES) and family structure categories (Adler et al., 1994; Lichter & Eggebeen, 1992; Williams et al., 1994). These effects of family structure have been found to be the remaining family socio-economic status (Sandefur et al., 1992) and often have been attributed to single parents' reduced involvement with less stringent supervision of children (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Thompson et al., 1992).

Various researchers believe that family structure affects children's academic performance (Gortmaker, Salter, Walker, & Dietz, 1990; Gutman & Eccles, 1999; Jordan & Nettles, 1999; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams., 2001). Children need all the support they can get from their parents, hence the study also believes that adolescents with higher levels of ability have higher levels of achievement, on average, than those with lower levels of ability. Also the present researcher believes that education in South Africa was affected greatly through the *Apartheid* regime, which also affected the family structure from the children perspective.

Finally, several studies find that children living without biological mothers fare worse educationally than those living without biological fathers (Biblarz & Raftery, 1999; Case, Lin, & McLanahan, 2001; Downey, 1994, 1995). However, Wojtkiewicz (1993) found that stepparents' gender had no effect on high school graduation rates.

The studies reviewed in this study concerning the relationship between family structure and schooling outcomes were conducted overseas, and the relationship has not been extensively examined in South Africa. Although both theoretical and empirical work points to the influence of family structure on educational outcomes, the relationship between family structure and educational outcome needs further exploration in South Africa.

2.4 FAMILY STRUCTURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Family structure has an effect on psychological wellbeing. But the relationship takes place in a complex manner. For instance, the educational background and socio-economic status of parents has been shown to be associated with low psychological well-being and depression on their part (Brody, Stoneman, Flor, McCrary, Hastings & Conyers, 1994; Goodnow, 1988; MacPhee, Fritz & Miller-Heyl, 1996; McLloyd, 1990), which in turn may further affect their parenting abilities and resources. A single mother family usually fits this profile, because it generally has limited financial resources, compared to a two-parent one. Moreover, Ross et al. (1992) have noted that marriage is associated with physical health, psychological well-being and lower mortality.

Work done in some less developed countries (i.e. Jamaica, Peru and Ghana) has shown that two-parent households may result in more favorable outcomes when compared to a single-parent family. Children in two parent households have greater access to parents' time and engage in more beneficial types of interactions (Amato, 1993), and that, in part may explain some of the differences found in family structure. Children in two parent households fare better, because they have two adults available for them. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that two-parent families necessarily result in more positive results (Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1993; Dawson, 1991).

Children who live in both extended-family and single-father households, have their welfare improved, because of their access to the remaining parent as well as other related adults committed to their care. In modified extended households, two-parent households and communal households, where other family members reside, who may provide housekeeping and child care services (Desai, 1992). Clearly, time spent with children is merely one component of the parenting process. Rather than merely the quantity, the quality of time is likely to be central. Access resources from his/her father and emotional support will depend not only on his proximity, but on his commitment and other competing demands. Single father households tend to have higher incomes, fewer time constraints and are more likely to have a resident partner. Children in such households are assumed to have access to more resources than those in single mother's households.

Some types of family structure influence children's achievement via the socio-economic and psychological conditions which affect parental well-being and the way in which they raise their children (Avenevoli, Sessa & Steinberg, 1999; McLanahan, 1999). In some countries however, the difference between children of female-headed and male-headed households are not large or statistically significant. For instance, Lloyd and Gage-Brandon (1993) have found that in Jamaica, Peru and Ghana female headed households appear to be better on average than male-headed households. Previous findings support the notion that even if female-headed households are constrained by low incomes and time, the priority given by mothers to the children's welfare may help safeguard their welfare, because of gender differences in care-giving preferences between men and women. Mothers are known to be more emotionally involved in the care of the children (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Nevertheless, Kramer (2004) points out that caution must be exercised in making such pronouncements, since men are now more involved in care than they once were and that they are more involved than realized. It is likely there may be associations between the style of care provided by fathers and mothers.

The family environment plays a critical role in child development and living arrangements are central contexts that shape development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Children's living arrangements represent an important contextual factor. For example, poor financial resources and low socioeconomic status (McLanahan, 1999; Mulkey, Crain, & Harrington, 1992; Pong & Ju, 2000), increased levels of single-parent stress (Forgatch, Patterson & Skinner, 1988), and a lack of time and energy to nurture and supervise children (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; McLanahan, 1999) are probable factors contributing to the effects of a broken (separated or divorced parents) family structure on inadequate parenting and subsequent children's achievement.

Bruce and Lloyd (1995) conducted a study in Latin America, and found that, after controlling for the socio-economic level of the family, children with parents in consensual unions (informal marriages), had a lower nutritional status than those who were with a married couple. It has also been shown that the effects of socio-economic conditions in the family are mediated via the ways in which parents deal with their children; and how they feel about their roles as parents. Lloyd (1993) also found that financial exchange tends to be precarious when parents are not linked to each other through marriage. For example; low financial resources; poor socio-economic factors; and parents' low educational status- seem to provide a basis for inadequate parenting and feelings of incompetence and stress (Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998).

However, it can be concluded from this present research that it is not the case that children from female-headed or male-headed households do worse at school. This argument clearly indicates that children from both family types can perform better at school. Also, underachieving pupils have been described as introverted, lonelier and less accepted by their peers than other pupils (Dix, 1991; Seagull & Weinshank, 1984; Valas, 1999). Similarly, underachievers have been found to exhibit more social immaturity and antisocial behaviour than high achieving pupils.

A dramatic increase in the number of households headed by women has generated a significant body of research on the relationship between family structure and child outcomes; generally finding that children living in two-parent families fare better on a number of outcomes compared with children in single parent homes (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Furthermore, several researchers have noted that the substantial increase in single parenthood is a primary contributor to the “feminisation of poverty” ‘which is a change in the levels of poverty biased against women or female-headed households (Hardy & Hazelrigg, 1993; Starrels et al., 1994). Female-headed households use their resources in ways that are more child-oriented. It has further been found that mother-child disagreement (Kuder, Fine & Sinclair, 1995), and the father’s absence (Beaty, 1995), as well as overall family instability all have a negative impact on children’s academic progress and adjustment.

It appears that the mother’s resources may be used directly and efficiently for the child’s benefit when she is primarily responsible for the household and has decision making authority. Many have hypothesized that differences in parenting and supervision account for the remaining gap. Since parents are an important resource for children—two are better than one. Thus, children without fathers whose mothers are able to head their own households may be better off than those who live as part of a separation within a larger household (Lloyd & Desai, 1992). Also cohabitating unions have become a very common family setting or setup in which children are raised.

In reflection, family structure in South Africa has not been studied in detail; hence there is a need for South African researchers to study family structure; particularly in relation to academic performance and psychological well-being in the country (South Africa).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three's purpose is to explain the methods and procedures that have been used and how they have been used. This study is a quantitative study, which is a method of gathering and analyzing measurable data. It includes variables of the study, participant, sampling, data collection, and measures used. The measures of family structure include school performance, Affect balance scale, General health questionnaire scale, Life satisfaction scale, and self-esteem.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The type of research design that was used in the study is a cross-sectional research design. A cross-sectional design involves the observation of some subset of a population at a certain point in time, with no intention of following up or repeating the observations at a different time. The design has the limitation that it may not provide information about the relation of cause and effect, but it is favored for being cost-effective when resources are limited.

3.3 VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

The variables of the study are as follows:

Independent Variables: Family structure.

Dependent Variables: School performance,
Psychological well-being (the following scales were incorporated to measure the construct: Affect Balance Scale, GHQ-12, Life Satisfaction Scale and Self-Esteem Scale.).

3.4 SAMPLING

Participants of the study were recruited from two high schools in the Mpumalanga Province. The schools, Mjokwane Secondary School and Zamokuhle Combined School, are both in the Nkomazi Municipality (Kamaqhekeza). Both schools are situated between Malelane and Komatipoort plaza, and are 50km away from the Mozambican border. Schools are classified as the so-called “no fees” schools, but there is some money that the learners volunteer to pay, and is called a “developmental” or “supplementary” fund. This money is paid in agreement with the parents for extra mural activities and other items that the government (Department of Basic Education) does not provide.

The study drew its sample by using non-probability sampling. The particular type used was convenience sampling, sometimes called grab or opportunity sampling. This is the method of choosing learners arbitrarily and in an unstructured manner from the frame. This method is often used during preliminary research efforts to get a gross estimate of the results, without incurring the cost or time required to select a random sample. The schools themselves were selected because permission to access the learners was granted by school authorities, and they (the schools) were available at the time the researcher conducted the study. The schools were also ideal because they were close to each other, within the Nkomazi East circuit of the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education, alleviating time and travel costs for the researcher.

Within each school, grades 8 to 12 classes were targeted. Mjokwane Secondary School has 5 classes for each grade (grades 8—12), and Zamokuhle Combined School has 3 classes for each grade (grades 8—9). The grade 12 learners at Mjokwane Secondary school were not available at the time of collecting data.

3.5 PROCEDURE

School authorities were sent a letter explaining the study, and requesting permission to access the students. All the necessary ethical considerations were taken into account when recruiting participants and collecting data. For instance, the researcher made the usual promises of maintaining the anonymity of participating learners and the confidentiality of their responses, the voluntary nature of participation, and the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any stage. Before starting with data collection, the researcher issued an open letter of invitation. It was distributed among learners to take home to their parents. The letter explained the nature and purpose of the study. It emphasized the voluntary aspect of participation. Parents gave passive consent. However, parents who did not want their children to take part in the study were requested to return the attached consent form having selected the option of refusing to participate.

Students themselves signed a consent form. It contained the same details as those provided to their parents and school authorities. The letter was also accompanied by a consent form. The students were approached in groups, during periods allotted by teachers. At least one educator in each school was assigned to assist with the logistics of assembling the students. But once they assembled, the educator left and the researcher and research assistants proceeded with data collection. Before commencing with administering the questionnaire, the researcher read the consent form, accepted questions for clarification, and then asked them to indicate in writing whether they accept to participate in the study or not. The researcher then went on to explain in detail to the learners what is required of them.

Learners were in their respective classrooms, each participant had a questionnaire. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The data collection packet, including the questionnaire, was in English, since that was the medium of instruction in the schools surveyed.

Data was collected while participants were in their classrooms. Before learners can answer any questions, each question and options from the questionnaire was read and explained to them, and then they chose the option that best applies to them.

3.6 MEASURES

3.6.1 A FAMILY STRUCTURE MEASURE

Respondents were required to identify the adults they lived with most of the time. Possible selections of family structure included the following family types: natural parents, natural mother and stepfather, natural father and stepmother, mother only, father only, legal guardian, grandparents, child headed and foster parents.

3.6.2 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MEASURE

Respondents were asked to report their school grades. Prior research shows a high correlation between self-reported and actual grades (e.g., end of the year results). In all, they were asked to state what their June examination outcomes were, whether they have passed the examinations or not; and they were also asked to state their overall symbol (a classification of performance ranging from a high “A” to a low “E” symbol). In addition, the learners were asked what highest grade they have passed at school. The item was meant to determine if the learner was repeating their current grade or not.

3.6.3 AFFECT BALANCE SCALE (ABS)

The ABS was developed by Norman M. Bradburn, as part of surveys conducted by him at NORC during the 1960’s to measure psychological well-being (Bradburn, 1969). Since its development in 1963, the ABS has been used extensively in a wide variety of settings and with a wide variety of populations.

The ABS is a 10-item rating scale containing five statements reflecting positive feelings and five statements reflecting negative feelings. The scale measuring positive feelings is called the ABS positive affect scale (ABS-PA) and the scale measuring negative affect is called the ABS negative affect scale (ABS-NA). The scale is administered to determine overall psychological well-being at a given point in time. The set of ten questions take more-or-less 5 to 10 minutes to complete on their own.

The ABS-PA uses questions such as: “during the past few weeks did you ever feel: *pleased about having accomplished something; that things were going your way?* The ABS-NA use the following questions; have you recently felt: “*so restless that you couldn’t sit long in a chair; and bored?*”The questions are presented in a “yes” or “no” format. Respondents are asked to focus on feelings during the past few weeks, and indicate a positive (yes) or negative (no) response to each of the scale items. PA and NA scale scores are obtained by summing ratings for the five positive and negative affect questions, respectively.

Scores range from 0 to 5 for each of the scales. The reliabilities of the ABS-PA and ABS-NA scales were $\alpha = 0.89$ and 0.85 , respectively (Bradburn, 1969). Additional research suggests that the ABS-PA and ABS-NA scales provide reliable, precise and largely independent measures of positive affect and negative effect, regardless of the subject or the time frame and response format used (Zevon & Tellegen, 1982). In the present study the Cronbach’s alpha for ABS-PA and ABS-NA is 0.67 , respectively, which implies that the subscales possess acceptable reliability levels.

3.6.4 **TWELVE-ITEM GENERAL HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE (GHQ-12)**

The GHQ-12 was developed by Goldberg in the 1970s. Since then, several versions of different lengths have been developed, and one of them is the GHQ-12. The GHQ-12 consists of 12 items, formatted as questions such as: Have you recently: “been able to concentrate on what you’re doing?”, “Lost much sleep

over worry?” scaled as: ‘not at all’, ‘same as usual’, ‘rather more than usual’, or ‘much more than usual’. The bimodal method of GHQ-12 scoring (0-0-1-1) and the standard, Likert-type scoring (0-1-2-3) methods were used previously (Goldberg & Williams, 1988), but for the present study the Likert-type scoring (0-1-2-3) was used. The resulting total score for the standard, Likert-type scoring method can range from 0 to 36. In both cases higher scores indicate higher probability of mental health problems.

The psychometric literature regarding the GHQ-12 shows that the scale generally has moderate to high reliability levels, as shown by the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, usually in the range of 0.78 to 0.97 (Goldberg & William, 1988). The GHQ-12’s reliability in this study is $\alpha = 0.70$, which means that the scale has an acceptable reliability level.

3.6.5 SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE (SWLS)

The SWLS was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Graffin (1985) to measure global life satisfaction, or satisfaction with one’s life as a whole rather than with a specific life domain. This scale has been widely used because of its brevity as well as its reliability and validity evidence. The five-item scale uses statements such as: *“In most ways my life is close to my ideal”*, and *“The conditions of my life are excellent”*. The scales items are rated as (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) slightly disagree, (4) neither agree nor disagree, (5) slightly agree, (6) agree, and (7) strongly agree. In previous studies, the scale had a coefficient alpha of 0.87, and showed good convergent validity (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The present study’s Cronbach alpha is 0.72. That means that the scale has an acceptable level of reliability.

3.6.6 ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE (RSES)

The RSES, one of the most used self-esteem scales, was developed by Rosenberg in 1965 to measure global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1989).

Rosenberg (1965) designed his 10-question scale that it should be responded to on a four-point response format, ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4). The RSES was designed to be a Guttman scale, which means that the scale items were meant to represent a continuum of self-worth statements, ranging from statements that are endorsed even by individuals with low self-esteem, to statements that are endorsed only by persons with high self-esteem. The scale uses statements such as: *“I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”* and *“I feel that I have a number of good qualities.”*The items are endorsed on a measurement scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree), to 4 (strongly disagree).In this study the scale achieved a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.77. That means that the scale has an acceptable level of reliability for the present sample.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the study. The chapter starts by presenting the plan of analysis. Actual analysis starts off by presenting a description of the sample using demographic information. The relationship between family structure and academic performance is presented. Also, the relationship between family structure and various measures of psychological well-being is explored.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

4.2.1 PLAN OF ANALYSING THE DATA

Analysis begins by describing the sample of the study. Thereafter, chi-squares are obtained to investigate the relationship between academic performance and family structure. Finally, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to see if the experience of well-being by learners will vary according to the different types of family structure they come from. For the ANOVA the total score of the respondent experience of well-being (GHQ-12, RSES and SWLS) was used as the response (dependent) variable and types of family structure are levels of treatment. A one-way ANOVA works under the assumptions that the observations are independent of each other and the family types have equal population variances, i.e., the variances among the family types are homogenous. However, the ANOVA F-tests are quite robust against departures from the normal distribution, especially for data with a large number of observations which is the case in this study (Kuehl, 2000). If these assumptions are violated by the data then the Kruskal-Wallis test, which is the non-parametric equivalent to the one-way ANOVA, will be used.

Therefore, assumptions will first be investigated for violation or not for the response variables. If the cause of violation of the assumption(s) is an outlier, assumption will be re-investigated by removing the outlier(s) as long as they are very few.

4.2.2 INITIAL ANALYSIS

The total scores of the GHQ-12, RSES and SWLS have range values of 15—48, 9—37 and 6—35, respectively and thus we have assumed that these variables are continuous. However, both the ABS-PA and ABS-NA scales have a range of integer values 0—5, thus we have used the Kruskal-Wallis test in their analysis.

The descriptive statistics (table 1a below) show that the distributions of the three total scores (GHQ-12, RSES and SWLS) deviate from normality, that is, they are skewed. If the population from which the data are obtained is normal, the skewness coefficient (which is a measure of symmetry) should be zero. A positive value for the skewness coefficient indicates that the data is right skewed whereas a negative value indicates that the data is left skewed. Furthermore, the kurtosis coefficient (which is a measure of spread) should also be near zero. A positive value for the kurtosis coefficient indicates that the distribution is steeper than a normal distribution whereas a negative value indicates that the distribution of the data is flatter than a normal distribution. However, the means and medians for the three variables are approximately equal, showing that the distribution for each of these variables is normal but contradicts the coefficients results. In such cases, graphical representations of the data should be examined.

The three outlier plots (appendix C, figures 1a, b and c) show that there are some outliers (observations represented by 0's). These might be the possible cause of skewed distributions. The Bartlett's test for homogeneity of variances shows that the equal variances assumption among the family types is violated for GHQ-12. We re-analysed the data after removing the outliers and the results are presented below.

All results in table1 (b) show improvement in the normality of the data and, further, the Bartlett's test for homogeneity of variances for GHQ-12 is statistically non-significant ($p = 0.052$) and thus the assumption is not violated. Therefore, the results in the analyses that follow for these three variables are based on a data set without outliers.

Table 1(a):

Descriptive statistics for response variables and Bartlett's Test for homogeneity of variances

<i>Variable</i>	Descriptive statistics				Bartlett's test for homogeneity of variances (<i>p</i>)
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	
GHQ-12	34.73				0.0254
SWLS	24.49	36.00	-1.01	1.86	<i>ns</i>
RSES	22.02	22.00	-0.04	-0.44	<i>ns</i>

Table 1(b):

Descriptive statistics for response variables and Bartlett's test for homogeneity of variances after removing outliers

<i>Variable</i>	Descriptive statistics				Bartlett's test for homogeneity of variances (<i>p</i>)
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	
GHQ-12	35.45	36.00	0.36	0.36	<i>ns</i>
SWLS	24.58	26.00	0.52	0.28	<i>ns</i>
RSES	21.87	22.00	0.19	0.30	<i>ns</i>

4.3 MAIN ANALYSIS

4.3.1 Description of the sample

Table 2 describes the learners with regard to their gender, marital status, mean age, symbol obtained during June examination, current level of study, school performance and family structure. The sample of the study consisted of 500 participating learners, distributed equally between the two schools, Zamokuhle Combined and Mjokwane Secondary. The largest proportions of learners came from grades 8 and 11 (31.4% each). The learners average age was 15.93 (SD = 2.12, range = 12—21). The youngest participating learner was 12 years old, turning 13 in the same year of data collection. The largest proportion (36.7%) of the learners came from families where both *biological parents* were present. The smallest (4.3%) came from families led by fathers only. The second largest proportion (25.7%) of learners came from families headed by mothers only.

Table 2:
Demographic information of the learners

	N	%	Mean	SD
<i>Gender of learners</i>				
Female	291	58.4%		
Male	206	41.4%		
<i>Marital Status</i>				
Married	5	1.0%		
Single	475	98.3%		
Cohabiting	2	0.4%		
Separated	1	0.2%		
Age			15.93	2.12
<i>School Performance: Symbol obtained in June examination</i>				
A	108	25.0%		
B	146	33.8%		
C	103	23.8%		
D	39	9.0%		
E	36	8.3%		
<i>Current level</i>				
Grade 8	134	31.4%		
Grade 9	90	21.1%		
Grade 10	68	15.9%		
Grade 11	134	31.4%		
<i>School Performance: June examination outcome</i>				
Pass	424	89.5%		
Fail	48	10.5%		
<i>School performance: Performance rating</i>				
Excellent	166	34.9%		
Good	271	56.9%		

	N	%	Mean	SD
Fair	32	6.7%		
Poor	7	1.5%		
<i>Family structure/type</i>				
Biological parent family	180	36.7%		
Mother-led family	126	25.7%		
Father-led family	21	4.3%		
Blended family	68	14.1%		
Grandparents family	51	10.6%		
Sibling-led family	37	7.7%		

4.3.2 Relationship between academic performance and family structure

Analysis was conducted to investigate the influence of family structure on academic performance. Academic performance was assessed in different ways. The learners were asked to state (a) whether they obtained an overall “pass” or “fail” in their mid-year examinations, the overall symbol they obtained, and rate their academic performance. Inter-correlation analysis between the variables found that the $r_s = 0.243, 0.252$ and 0.288 , and all p -values were in excess of 0.001 . Each of the academic performance measures was entered into a cross-tabulation analysis, to investigate its relationship with family structure.

4.3.2.1 *Academic performance: Mid-year academic outcome*

Four hundred and seventy-four learners gave responses to the question whether they have passed or failed their June examinations. Four hundred and twenty-four (89.5%) said they passed the June examinations. Chi-square analysis was conducted to investigate the association of family structure on the overall outcome of half-year (June) examinations. The results are contained in table 3(a) and they show that family structure has no association with half-year examinations outcome ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3(a):

Learner family structure and the “pass-fail” classification: Mid year final examinations success

Family type	June examinations outcome		χ^2	<i>p</i>
	Pass	Fail		
			6.889	<i>ns</i>
Mother-led family	108 (90.0%)	12 (10.0%)		
Both parents family	152 (91.6%)	14 (8.4%)		
Blended family	62 (92.5%)	5 (7.5%)		
Father-led family	18 (90.0%)	2 (10.0%)		
Grandparent family	40 (80.0%)	10 (20.0%)		
Sibling family	29 (85.3%)	5 (14.7%)		

4.3.2.2 *Academic performance: Overall symbol obtained in mid-year examinations*

Learners also reported the overall symbol they obtained in their mid-year (June) examinations. Almost 83% of the learners said that they had obtained an aggregate A, B or C symbol. Chi-square analysis was conducted to investigate the association of family structure on the overall symbol reported by the learners for their half-year (June) examinations. The results in table 3(b) show that family structure was significantly related to the learners' reports of their mid-year examinations aggregate symbols ($p < 0.01$). However, the pattern of how the learners reported their symbols did not show obvious advantages for certain family types. Learners from grandparent-led families reported an A symbol, yet it was learners from biological parents families who were highest in reporting the B symbol. Overall, mother-led and biological parents-led families seem to have the largest number of learners reporting the highest symbols. Grandparent-led families follow closely. Learners from sibling-led families tended to report the worst symbols, followed by learners from blended families.

Table 3(b):

Learner family structure by outcomes of half yearly examinations: Mid-year examinations overall symbol

Family Type	Mid-year examinations overall symbol					χ^2	<i>p</i>
	E	D	C	B	A		
						38.631	0.007
Mother-led	10 (10.0%)	5 (5.0%)	27 (27.0%)	32 (32.0%)	26 (26.0%)		
Both parents	5 (3.2%)	12 (7.6%)	37 (23.6%)	62 (39.5%)	41 (26.1%)		
Blended	9 (14.5%)	5 (8.1%)	15 (24.2%)	22 (35.5%)	11 (17.5%)		
Father-led	0 (0.0%)	5 (13.5%)	3 (3.0%)	4 (2.9%)	7 (6.7%)		
Grandparent-led	2 (4.5%)	6 (13.6%)	11 (25.0%)	12 (27.3%)	13 (29.5%)		
Sibling-led	8 (23.5%)	4 (11.8%)	7 (20.6%)	8 (23.5%)	7 (20.6%)		

4.3.2.3 *Academic performance: Qualitative classification of mid-year examinations outcomes*

Learners also provided a qualitative rating of their academic performance on a four-point scale ranging from poor to excellent. Chi-square analysis was conducted to investigate the association between family structure and the learners' self-ratings of their academic performance. The results as presented in table 3(c) show that family structure does not influence the academic self-ratings of the learners ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3(c):**Learner family structure by qualitative classification of academic performance: Mid-year examinations rating**

Family type	Qualitative classification of academic performance				χ^2	<i>p</i>
	Poor	fair	good	excellent		
					12.427	<i>ns</i>
Mother-led	1 (0.9%)	8 (6.8%)	66 (56.4%)	42 (35.9%)		
Biological parents	3 (1.8%)	11 (6.5%)	107 (63.3%)	48 (28.4%)		
Blended	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.4%)	35 (51.5%)	30 (44.1%)		
Father-led	0 (0.0%)	2 (9.5%)	12 (57.1%)	7 (33.3%)		
Grandparent-led	2 (4.2%)	3 (6.3%)	25 (52.1%)	18 (37.5%)		
Sibling-led	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.3%)	18 (50.0%)	15 (41.7%)		

4.3.3 The association of family structure with psychological distress, life satisfaction, self-esteem and affect balance

Psychological well-being was measured with a number of scales, including the positive and negative affect scale (ABS-PA and ABS-NA), the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS), the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) and the general health questionnaire (GHQ-12). The mean scores of the scales for the present sample are shown according to family types in table 4 below. The varieties of family structure included in the analysis were mother-only, both biological parents present and the blended types. These are the commonly cited types in the literature.

Table 4:

One-way Analysis of Variance and Kruskal-Wallis test results of psychological well-being with family structure means

Psychological well-being	Family type						F ratio /	
	Single Mother-led	Both-parents	Blended	Father-led	Grandparent-led	Sibling-led	χ^2	
	$\bar{X}(SD)$	$\bar{X}(SD)$	$\bar{X}(SD)$	$\bar{X}(SD)$	$\bar{X}(SD)$	$\bar{X}(SD)$	value	p -value
^{1,3} GHQ-12	35.23(6.67)	36.66(5.56)	35.14(6.12)	36.42(6.82)	34.13(5.90)	34.68(6.28)	2.00	0.077
^{1,4} SWLS	24.50(7.36)	24.50(6.37)	23.55(6.98)	25.05(7.11)	25.64(6.28)	25.64(6.28)	1.05	0.385
^{1,5} RSES	21.82(5.17)	20.79(4.60)	22.73(5.11)	23.71(4.60)	22.64(4.37)	22.71(5.28)	3.44	0.005
^{2,6} ABS-PA	3.84(1.40)	3.85(1.29)	3.89(1.36)	3.75(1.45)	3.84(1.50)	4.35(1.03)	5.49	0.359
^{2,7} ABS-NA	1.36(1.37)	1.79(1.48)	1.78(1.66)	1.90(1.37)	1.88(1.72)	1.00(1.41)	15.17	0.009

Note: (1) One-way ANOVA; (2) Kruskal-Wallis test; (3) GHQ-12 = Twelve-item general health questionnaire; (4) SWLS = Satisfaction with life scale; (5) RSES = Rosenberg self-esteem scale; (6) ABS-PA = Affect balance scale positive affect; (7) ABS-NA = Affect balance scale negative Affect.

(a) Psychological distress (GHQ-12)

The GHQ-12 was used to measure psychological distress among learners, and a one-way analysis of variance was conducted on the data to investigate whether learners' family types will have any association with the reported rates of psychological distress. Results of ANOVA show that the probability value of the difference between the mean scores for the different family types on psychological distress is marginal, and Eta-squared, the measure of effect size calculated in the analysis, revealed that only 2.17% of the variance in psychological distress can be accounted for by knowledge of the learners' family type ($F_{[36, 435]} = 2.00$, $p < 0.10$, $\eta^2 = 0.0217$; see table 4).

(b) Life Satisfaction (SWLS)

ANOVA was also conducted to investigate the difference in mean scores for life satisfaction (as measured with the SWLS) between the various family types reported by the learners. Results show that the learners' experience of life satisfaction did not differ according to their respective family structures, and the Eta squared effect size calculated in the analysis was only 1.1% ($F_{[31, 439]} = 1.05$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.011$; see table 4).

(c) Global Self-esteem (RSES)

ANOVA was conducted on the data to investigate whether learners' family types will have any association with mean self-esteem scores (measured with the RSES) of learners. Results of ANOVA show that there were differences in the experience of self-esteem by learners from different types of family structure ($F_{[27, 448]} = 3.44$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.036$; see table 4). Important to note though, is that the effect size was only 3.6% in spite of the mean differences between the family types being statistically significant. This means that knowledge of family type explains a relatively negligible amount of variance in reported global self-esteem.

Nevertheless, the LSD *post-hoc* test (calculated using the statistical programme SAS) revealed that learners from the biological-parents family type recorded high self-esteem scores compared to those who came from blended, father-led, grandparent-led, and sibling-led family types, and the differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

(d) Affect Balance: positive affect (ABS-PA) and negative affect (ABS-NA)

The affect balance scale's positive affect (ABS-PA) and negative affect (ABS-NA) scales are two distinct measures, therefore they were analyzed separately. The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to investigate if there were significant differences between various types of family structure on both ABS-NA and ABS-PA. The results show that ABS-PA ($\chi^2 = 5.49, p > 0.05$) did not differentiate between the various types of family structure. However, learners from various family structures obtained different scores on ABS-NA ($\chi^2 = 15.17, p < 0.01$) (see table 4). A helicopter view of the mean scores in table 4 shows that learners from the sibling-led and the single-mother led family types obtained the least scores on ABS-NA, and learners from the father-led and grandparent-led family types obtained the highest scores on the same measure.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examined the association of family structure on the academic performance and psychological well-being of school-going children. The current chapter will start by examining family structure in relation to academic performance, and followed by the family structure in relation to psychological well-being scales.

5.2 FAMILY STRUCTURE IN RELATION TO ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The study investigated the relationship between family structure and academic performance. Academic performance was defined or operationalized in three ways, namely, as a “pass” (exam success) or “fail” (no exam success), report of the pass symbol obtained in the final examinations for the particular year. Family structure consisted of family types such as biological parent, single parent (mother or father only family), blended/step family, sibling family, and grandparent family. There was no association between family structure and academic outcomes in two of the three academic outcomes measures. Although specific measures of academic outcomes were used, results obtained in this study are generally contrary to what other studies have previously found. An abundance of studies previously conducted by various researchers suggest that in countries such as the United States children who live with two biological parents experience better academic achievements than children living in other family arrangements (Amato, 1993; Amato & Keith, 1991; Blibarz & Raftery 1999; Cox & Paley, 1997; McLanahan 1994; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Powell & Steelman, 1990). Available South African research is consistent, supporting the educational benefits of growing up within an intact family structure (Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

However, the results of the present study are inconsistent with the trend, in that they show no relationship between educational achievement and family structure.

It is not clear why educational achievement and family structure did not associate in two of the three academic variables used in this study. One of the reasons could be the manner in which data for academic success was done. A self-report method may be inadequate. The reliability of the school ratings themselves, which the children may have reported reliably, cannot be ruled out. The researcher did request the learners to view their official academic records, but this was eventually not done due to the complex administrative process that it entailed. It would seem that future research using academic performance as a variable should plan for doing this as an important step.

Furthermore, it could be that some factors that could clarify the association between family structure and academic performance were not taken into account. One such factor is family resources, including economic standing (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). It seems that the factor that explains the negative impact of single-motherhood and educational achievement is poverty. Studies conducted by Ellwood and Bane (1985) and Danziger and Plotnick (1981) suggest that female-headed households have a high risk of poverty, unemployment, poor physical and mental health. Children from single mothers are more likely to be poor when compared to those in two parent families. Admittedly, there are times when children from single-mother families fare better in cognitive achievement than those from two-parent families; when the former are stable and the latter are unstable (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that children who did not live with both biological parents were roughly twice as likely to be poor, give birth outside of marriage, have behavioural and psychological problems, and not graduate from high school.

There are many levels at which the influence of the family can impact child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, 1979). According to some researchers, differences in the academic achievement of children from single-parent and two-parent families can be related to changes in the economic circumstances of families (Demo & Acock, 1996; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994) and therefore family resources and learning opportunities outside of the school period (Entwisle & Alexander, 1995). They can also be related to variations in the quality of parent-child interactions in the different family structures. Yet, on average, children in single-parent families are more likely to have problems, than those who live in intact families headed by two biological parents. According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) children living in single-parent households are, on average, less successful in school and experience more behaviour problems, than children living in two-parent households. Studies have found that growing up without a biological parent is negatively associated with schooling attainments, and also with a number of other indicators of later economic success (such as employment, earning, income, and wealth) (Manski, Sandefur & McLanahan, 1992). There is disagreement, however, about whether the impact of family structure is causal (Manski et al., 1992).

However, some literature proposes that much of family structure research is inconclusive, because it has failed to differentiate among various types of single-parent families, such as whether they result from marital disruption (divorce or separation), parental death, or a never-married parent. The present study did not attempt to clarify the cause of single parenthood.

5.3 FAMILY STRUCTURE IN RELATION TO PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

The present study also investigated the relationship between family structure and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being was measured with five scales, namely, the GHQ-12 (general distress), the SWLS (life satisfaction), the RSES (global self-esteem), and the ABS-PA and ABS-NA (affect balance).

In general, psychological wellbeing was not associated to family structure on three of the five measures used. It is for that reason that this section discusses the outcomes of all psychological well-being associations with family structure together.

Studies have reported associations between family structure and both physical and psychological well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991; Bramlett & Blumberg, 2007; Jablonska & Lindberg, 2007; Weitoft, Hjern, Haglund, & Rosen, 2003). Family structure is linked not only to physical health in childhood, but it also predicts health in adulthood (Lundberg 1997). Family structure in childhood is also linked to emotional problems in adulthood (Mizell, 1999). In this study, three of the measures of well-being (GHQ-12, SWLS and AB-NA) could not differentiate between the identified types of family structure.

The results of the present study are surprising. Yet there is nothing in the study to give a clue as to why there is no association between family structure and psychological wellbeing, especially that there were some significant associations in some of the aspects of psychological wellbeing measured. One possible explanation lies in the validity of the measures in this particular sample. Although the measures are well-known and have been used extensively in psychological research, research on their psychometric properties in the South African context is visibly lacking. Moreover, a method used to create the different types of family structure may be limited. We have already hinted that the study failed to identify further categories of single parenthood, that is, single parenthood was not differentiated according to its reasons for occurrence. Family structure per se may not reveal more about learners' adjustment in general. Oliva, Arranz, Parra and Olabarrieta (2014) found that when they controlled for contextual and demographic variables, they could not find differences between the different family structures they studied. Phillips (2012) could not find an association between family structure and psychological wellbeing, but found the association between family climate and psychological well-being.

Phillips warns that with regards to psychological wellbeing, “what goes on inside the family matters more than who is in the family” (Phillips, 2012, p. 108). In other words, studying family structure in exclusion of the processes taking place within the family types could mask the fundamental differences between the different structures.

Although ABS-NA was not associated with family structure, ABS-PA was. Positive and negative affect represent polar opposites of adjustment; positive affect is associated with well-being, and negative affect with maladjustment (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Losada 2005). Given that the present study was conducted among learners, a group that would have, under normal circumstances, low rates of psychopathology and maladjustment, it is not surprising that many of them did not endorse items of the affect balance scale measuring negative affect (ABS-NA). Association between ABS-PA, the positive variant of the affect balance scale, could simply mean that the learners were more willing to endorse those aspects of the scale that referred to positive emotions in their lives, being youngsters who have not as yet gained the capacity to admit their negative emotions readily. This may also be more so, given that the learners who participated in this study are predominantly African (Kitayama, Markus & Kurokawa, 2000). It is known that the expression of positive and negative emotions is a culturally bound phenomenon.

Studies also show that single-parent and variously restructured families are likely to experience, among other problems, low self-esteem and internalizing and externalizing behaviours (Amato, 1993; Amato & Keith, 1991; Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). In that respect, this study has shown that almost all types of family structure fail to promote self-esteem. Only the learners from the two-parent family reported high levels of self-esteem. An aspect that came as a surprise was that self-esteem correlated with family structure, whereas life satisfaction was not related to it.

It is known that life satisfaction, together with wellbeing, tends to have a high correlation with self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 2009; Proctor, Linley & Maltby, 2009), and, in fact, self-esteem was found to have the capacity to predict life satisfaction (Yetim, 2003). These results mean that these variables (self-esteem and life satisfaction) are expected to associate the same with other variables. Therefore, when self-esteem is related to family structure and life satisfaction is not, the results are unexpected.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

The present study is limited in terms of the literature and theories that have a particular relevance to South Africa. The majority of the studies used refer to Western societies. It is not clear whether the frameworks used are completely appropriate for African populations. For instance, studies show that although family structure may impact experiences such as life satisfaction and self-esteem in the same direction, the magnitude of the impact differs (e.g., Bjarnason et al., 2012).

Other data limitations include the absence of information about how much time children spend with each parent figure, what sources of social, financial, and emotional support are available to the children and who is providing them, and how close the child is to parents or other caregivers. Such data are necessary to disentangle the interrelated effects of family structure, family resources, and family processes on children's academic and social well-being. For instance, it could be that children in fatherless families have positive exposure to their fathers (Carlson, 2006; Thomas, Krampe & Newton, 2008).

Fathers themselves may perceive themselves as an important part of their children's lives, providing emotional and economic support. The study defined family structure in static terms, at one point in time. However, it could have been beneficial to assume that family structure changes over a child's life time.

Depending on how the current family structure was arrived at, its impact may differ. Studying family structure at one point obscures certain points, such as whether the single mother is a divorcee or has never married. The level of poverty and economic resources may differ depending on whether a single mother is a divorcee or has never married. The presence of other adults who are not the parents of the child may also have an effect on the development of the child.

5.5 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The present study focussed on family structure in exclusion of family processes. The studies of family structure could be more enlightening if they also incorporate family processes rather than being limited to family structure only.

It is recommended that future studies should consider models that do not simply study the association of family structure on academic and psychological outcomes, but also include mediating factors such as father involvement. South Africa has a history of fatherless families, some of which was imposed by the homeland and migrant labour systems. Additional variables to consider are the mental health of the mother, the economic standing of the family, and so on.

A longitudinal design is also desirable. Studying family structure cross-sectionally makes it difficult to know what its long-term effects are on the individual. Moreover, the family structure of an individual sometimes goes through changes over time, leading to different effects. The same individual may also experience the family structure differently depending on his/her developmental stage. Since longitudinal designs may be expensive and time consuming to implement, a compromise would be to collect information retrospectively. This type of information would, for instance, provide clues about what the child's early family structure was and how does it impact later development.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The results of the present study show that family structure is not related to most of the expected outcomes, emanating from academic achievement and psychological well-being constructs. Family structure was associated only with the overall symbol achieved on the June examinations. Regarding psychological wellbeing, family structure was only associated with self-esteem (as measured with the RSES), but not with psychological distress (GQH-12), life satisfaction (SWLS) and affect balance (ABS-PA and ABS-NA). The results are unexpected, since the variables are all known to be associated to family structure. There may be reason why the findings are the way they are, but these are not clear in the present study. One of the areas to speculate from is that of the psychometric properties of the scales. Although the scales have been used extensively in psychological research, intense study of their psychometric properties, either than the mere calculation of reliability, has not been undertaken in South Africa.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Did you agree to participate in this study?

YES	NO
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If you have agreed to participate in this study, please answer ALL the questions below.

1. **How old are you?** _____ years old

2. **What is your sex?** Female Male

3. **Your marital status:**

Married Single Cohabiting Divorced Separated

FAMILY STRUCTURE

4. Who are the people who live in your household for the better part of the year?
Please mark with a cross all the individuals who live in your household for the better part of the year.

Mother and Father	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stepmother and Natural Father	<input type="checkbox"/>
Father Only	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stepfather and Natural Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mother Only	<input type="checkbox"/>	Grandparent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal Guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Foster Parent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brothers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sisters	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. If you are living with grandparents, how old are they on average? ___ years old.
6. The number of family members at home, including yourself. ___ persons.

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

- a) What were your results of the half yearly (June) exams?

PASS

FAIL

- b) What symbol did you obtain from your half yearly exams?
Symbol

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
- c) How would you rate your school performance?

EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
-----------	------	------	------
- d) What is your highest standard passed at school? Grade

8	9	10	11
---	---	----	----
- d) What is your current level of study? Grade

8	9	10	11
---	---	----	----
- f) Do you agree that I should ask your class teacher to show me your previous year's final examination results?

YES	NO
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APPENDIX C: STEM-AND-LEAF AND BOX PLOTS FOR THE GHQ-12, SWLS AND RSES

**Figure 1a:
Stem-and-leaf and box plots for GHQ-12**

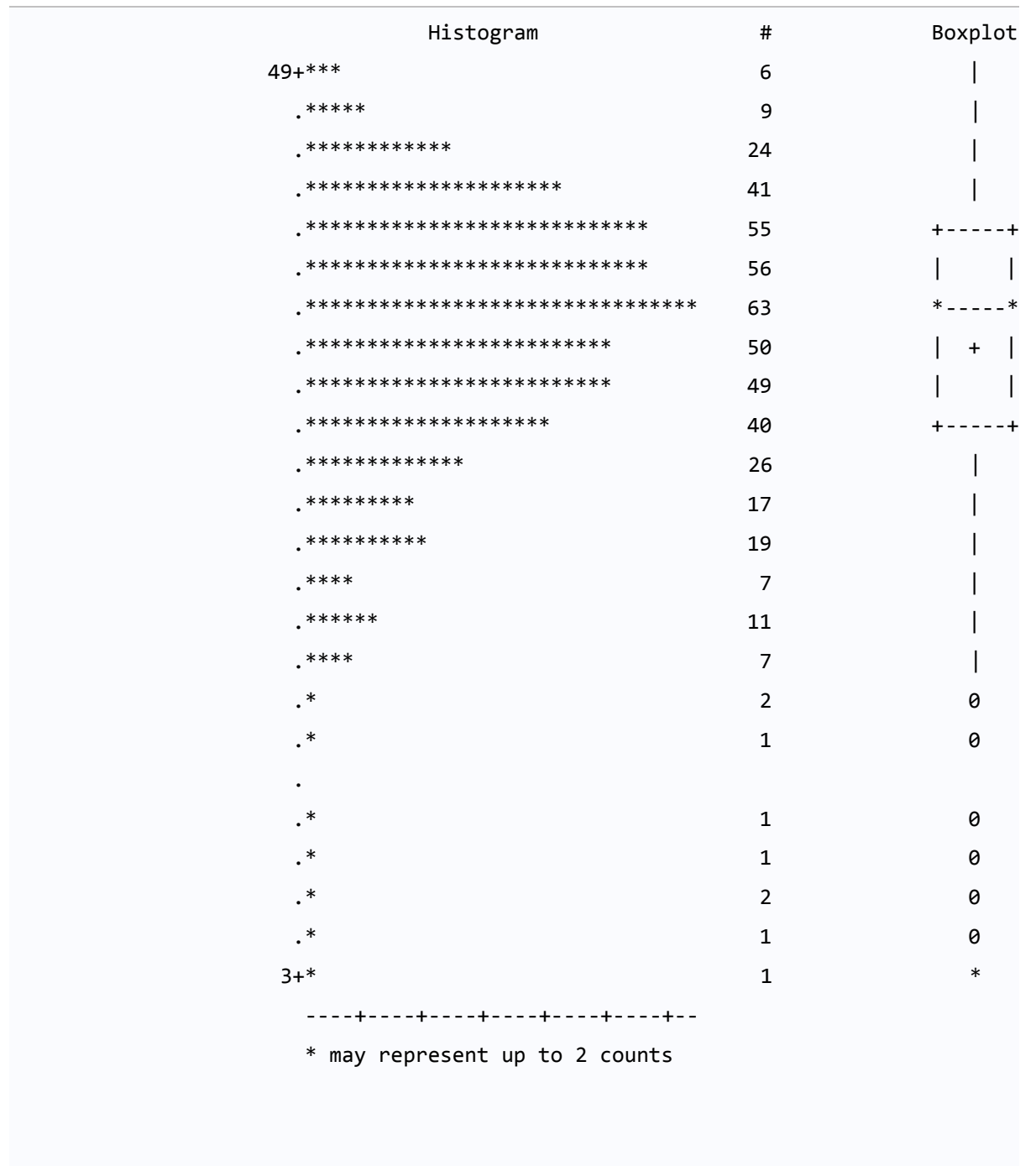


Figure 1b:
Stem-and-leaf and box plots for SWLS

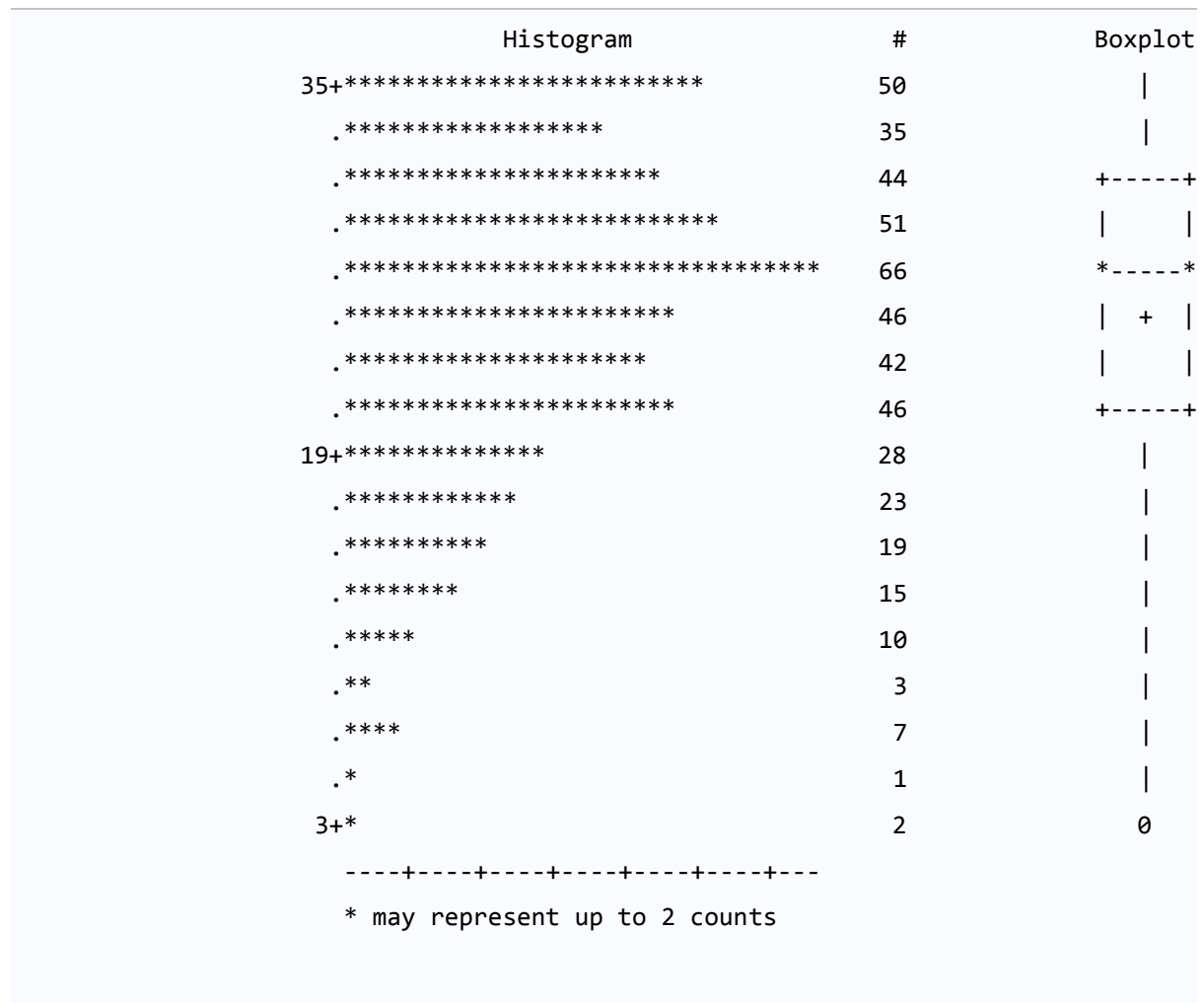


Figure 1c:
Stem-and-leaf and box plots for RSES

