

**EXPLORATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS  
FROM CHILD-HEADED FAMILIES IN MANKWENG AREA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

by

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THESIS

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## DECLARATION

I declare that **EXPLORATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS FROM CHILD-HEADED FAMILIES IN MANKWENG AREA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

.....

**Full names**

.....

**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my daughter Noko Oreneile. No one else will ever know the strength of my love for you; after all you are the only one who knows what my heart sounds like from the inside.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly and most importantly, I would like to thank the almighty God for the strength, courage and motivation He gave me throughout my studies. I am sure that without His blessings I wouldn't have made it here, I DO NOT BELIEVE HE CAN BRING ME THIS FAR TO LEAVE ME!

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My parents Sentsshuhleng and Kobela for their support, understanding and being my source of strength throughout my life, especially during my student years. My siblings Mpho, Mapula and Lesiba and my brother in law katlego for always being by my side through thick and thin.

My daughter, Noko Oreneile, for her unconditional love, and for inspiring me to be the best I can be.

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The Department of Education, Limpopo Province, for granting me the permission to conduct the study within the Capricorn district.

## ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to explore and describe the psychosocial experiences of secondary school learners from child-headed households in Mankweng area, Limpopo province. A qualitative research approach, specifically the phenomenological research design was used in this study. Ten grade 8 to 10 learners (male = 5; female = 5), aged between 16 and 18 years were purposively selected and requested to participate in the study. Data were collected through structured interviews. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method was used to analyse the data.

The following three categories of themes were identified: a). Circumstances leading to child-headed households; b). Socioeconomic themes category; and, c). Psychosocial themes category. Each of the three categories yielded a number of themes. There were nine psychosocial category themes that emerged from the data. These among others included the following: a). Poor scholastic performance by learners from child-headed families; b). Increased levels of sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy for the girl child; and, c). Psychosocial trauma. With regard to coping strategies, the study found that girls tended to engage in risky sexual behaviour as a way to access financial support and to cope with their challenges when compared to boys who tended to engage in more positive behaviour like garden work in order to earn a living.

Based on the above findings, the study recommends that learners from child-headed households should receive counselling support from school based support teams. Special consideration should be given to the orphaned girl child who is more vulnerable to psychosocial risks when compared to a boy child from a similar family background. The study further recommends that community support centres be established in order to support learners from child-headed families with after-school care, meals and recreational activities. There is also a need for community forums to be established and to prioritise the safety of their neighbourhoods in order for all children to feel appreciated and safe in their environments. The Department of Social Development should also continue to provide the support grant to learners who have reached the age of 18 who live in child-headed households as they still need care and support.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

It has been estimated that by the year 2015, there may be up to 5.7 million children in Africa who would have lost one or both parents (Zamani & Yolanda, 2007). With such a high number of children who become orphaned, many households become child-headed. In an investigation that focused on the phenomenon of child-headed families in South Africa, Meintjes, Hall, Marera and Boule (2010) found that it is often the oldest sibling who becomes the familial caregiver. The study further found that up to 0.87 % of the families in South Africa are headed by orphans aged between 7-18 years. Studies have found that this type of family structure has a number of challenges that, among others include psychological and behavioural problems (Bower, 2005; Walker, 2002).

An analysis of the 2012 general house survey found that 0.67% of children in South Africa were living in child headed households. In 2012 almost 44% of child headed households consisted of only one child. Recently, most child headed households have been found to consist of between 1 or 3 members (Poueslen, 2012). Over half (55%) of children living in child headed household are 14 years of age and older. In the majority (88%) of child headed households, there is at least one child who is 15 years or older. an equivalent of approximately 122000 children of the 18, 2 million children in South Africa. Most of these children (approximately 90%) were located in Limpopo (77.9%), KwaZulu Natal (71.1%) and Eastern Cape 73.4% (Meintjes, Hall, Marera & Boule, 2009).

In a study that focused on HIV/AIDS and the phenomenon of child-headed families in South Africa, Maqoko (2006) found that challenges faced by orphans in this kind of family arrangement, include among others, difficulty in obtaining food and shelter, a high risk of being sexually abused by relatives and neighbours, the threat of child prostitution and child labour, and difficulty in procuring healthcare and social security benefits. According to Walker (2002), the child-headed family arrangement has a negative impact on the child's academic performance, resulting in poor concentration, decreased participation in class activities, and a decline in school grades. South African government found a solution to meet the child headed

children's needs by providing programmes, safe places like UNICEF and free access to school material, food during break and free education, Creswell (2008).

In an earlier study that focused on Kenyan children orphaned by HIV and AIDS, Ayieko (2007) found that a large number of children from child-headed families do not attend school for several reasons. The most common reason given was that of lack of funds. For those who remained in school, most were found to experience poor academic performance due to low class attendance, lack of school materials, poor diet and poor living conditions. Based on the few studies reviewed above, it does appear that the phenomenon of child-headed families leads to some considerable psychological and behavioural problems.

Mogotlane, Chauke, Van Rensburg, Human and Kganakga (2010) established that in South Africa, many families and communities were struggling to cope with the effects of HIV and AIDS, especially in the areas of care and support of child-headed households. In recent studies by the Zimbabwe National AIDS Council (2011), it was claimed that there was a dramatic increase in the number of orphans in Zimbabwe where an estimated 240 000 were believed to be operating in child-headed households.

Many social psychologists have tried to understand the relationship between family characteristics and cognitive performance of children so as to fully assist every learner to learn purposefully countrywide. Questions on cognition and child-headed households were raised as a subject of debate amongst researchers with reference to many nations including South Africa. Cluver and Gardiner (2007) have pointed out that the psychological well-being of children is under-researched. Observations suggest that child-headed children suffered mental stress and anxiety. Cluver and Gardiner (2007) further contended that very little was known about factors that affected orphans' mental health.

## **1.2 Research problem**

Apart from the socio-economic hardships and academic challenges that children from child-headed families face, some studies have revealed that these orphaned children

face many psychological problems, including the disruption of their normal childhood and adolescence (Booyesen & Arntz, 2002; Bradshaw, Johnson, Schneider, & Bourne, 2002; Chilangwa, 2004; De Klerk, 2006; Foster, Makufa, Drew & Kralov, 1997; Tsegaye, 2007). Although the phenomenon of orphans' plight emanating from their psychosocial difficulties has been researched, the researcher is not aware of any studies that have sought to understand and describe the lived psychological experiences of learners from child-headed families in communities in Limpopo Province. The present study thus seeks to address this gap in knowledge.

### 1.3 Definition of concepts

For the purpose of this research the following two concepts will be operationally defined:

- **Child-headed household:** Bequele (2007) describes a child-headed household as a household where practically everyone who lives in the household is 18 years or younger and the head of the household is one of these children who is responsible for providing leadership and sustenance for the household. For the purpose of this research, the term 'child-headed family' will be defined as orphaned, abandoned, or neglected children who live in a household in which the oldest member is under the age of 18 and where there is no adult supervision.
- Beegle, Weerd, and Dercon, (2006). defines a child headed household as a home set-up where the children are double orphans and the home is headed or led by a child usually the older child, the child heading the household is recognized as being independent, responsible for providing leadership and making major decisions in running the household. He/she is responsible for feeding, maintaining the household along with the other children and caring for young siblings, thus adopting parents` roles.
- **Learner:** A learner is someone (especially a child) who learns (from a teacher) or takes up knowledge or beliefs (Guest, 2001). In this study a learner would refer to children age 10-18 years of age, who are currently attending school.

#### **1.4 Aim of the study**

The aim of the present study was to explore the psychological experiences of learners who come from child-headed families.

#### **1.5 Objectives of the study**

- To describe the meanings that learners attach to their status as members of child-headed families;
- To determine what learners from child-headed families consider as their challenges; and,
- To establish the psychological strategies that learners from child-headed families use to cope with the demands associated with their environment of relative deprivation.

#### **1.6 Research questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What meanings do learners from child-headed families attach to their status as members of this kind of family arrangement?
- What challenges do learners from child-headed families face?
- What do learners from child-headed families consider to be their psychological strategies to cope with the demands associated with their environment of relative deprivation?

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The phenomenon of child-headed family

According to Makiwane (2004), the highest percentage of children orphaned in Africa is in countries with high HIV prevalence levels. According to Soudien and Alexander, (2003), these are mostly countries in Southern Africa, and include Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Based on the HIV infection rates prevailing at the time when Matseke (2001) conducted his study, it was estimated that over 80 per cent of these children will be orphaned by the year 2020 as a result of adults dying from HIV/AIDS. Whilst HIV and AIDS are the leading cause of child-headed families, other studies have pointed out that throughout Africa, and more especially in the Southern African region, children are left destitute and vulnerable for a wide range of other reasons, and that some of the common factors contributing to the phenomenon of child-headed families include war, displacement, desertion, separation and migrant work (Meintjies et al., 2010; Nkomo, 2006). In Rwanda, for example many children were left destitute as a result of the civil war that took place in the mid to late nineties. According to Madhavan (2008), three out of four orphaned children were isolated from their communities as a result of the civil war.

A study conducted in Zimbabwe on factors leading to child-headed household found that some of these children were left to live on their own because close relatives (for instance, uncles and aunties) did not want to take up the responsibility due to economic strain (Moime, 2007). In other instances children opted to stay together in their own home due to the risk of separation, or trying to keep family property. In some cases, the option to stay together was found to be motivated by fear of mistreatment and exploitation by foster families, or a need to fulfil promises made to dying parents. Whereas in some instances child headed children are observed within their immediate families some last longer until they are independent while others resort to be on their own to fend for themselves, following the death of their parents, children must make the adjustment from being a child to being the head of a household, an adjustment that carries many challenges. Nkomo's (2006) study in Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal identified several key components of this adjustment. These, among others include: the feeling of having lost one's childhood and sense of self (with the attendant feelings of deprivation), a feeling of having to take

responsibility towards one's family (younger siblings), uncertainty about personal safety, and fears of family disintegration.

In war stricken countries, children are forced to join military or rebel groups for survival and protection (Bowen, 2006). Heads of child-headed households are involved in child labour as a means of sourcing for money for the household's subsistence. A study by Tsegaye (2007) also found that the dire economic situation faced by many of the children in child-headed households often lead to their engagement in hazardous child labour. The same study by Tsegaye (2007) further found that most of the heads of child-headed households earn a livelihood for their household through daily labour and petty trade and a significant number of girls are engaged in domestic employment, mainly as maids. Children in child-headed households in urban areas are more susceptible to exploitative circumstances than those in rural areas. This susceptibility to economic exploitation, hazardous work, forced labour and physical abuse is worsened by life on the streets and the desperate need to make money on a daily basis for their subsistence. A study by Matseke (2001) the study explored and described the educational challenges of early adolescents who head families as a result of their parents being migrant workers in Limpopo province. The findings indicated that early adolescents encounter various educational challenges.

## **2.2 African cultural context and the child-headed family**

In Africa, the extended family is the traditional social security system that ensures the protection of the vulnerable members (Unger, Parker, Antal & Tressell, 2000). Nkomo, (2006) therefore observes that in the African culture, every child is the responsibility of the community. Hunter (2000) further argues that parenthood is not necessarily a unitary role. Makiwane (2004) is of the view that parenthood is about social responsibility, both physical and mental. Therefore even where biological and social reproduction is separated, many people can fulfil the role of parents without having genetic ties to children. According to Hunter (2000), social responsibility ensures that children have civil and kinship identity and status (including residence and inheritance), nurturance, rearing, socialisation, and training through formal and vocational education or by providing household assistance or companionship. It also ensures sponsorship into the adult community with such actions like initiation at

puberty or assistance in starting a business. Social responsibility is thus not vested in biological parents alone.

Evans (2004) observed that, apart from keeping the child safe and free from harm, child rearing practices in the African context also include activities connected with providing emotional support and reducing stress. These practices were further found to nurture positive human growth whilst providing a relative safe environment for exploration. The lack of this support during early years has a permanent effect, not only on a child's physical well-being, but also on a child's social and cognitive development. In recent years however, social changes such as migratory labour, the cash economy, demographic change, formal education and westernisation, have weakened the extended family system. It can therefore no longer address problems such as orphan-hood as a stand-alone system

From the above discussion, the following insights can be drawn as relevant for the present study. First is the notion of collective parenting and responsibility towards children. In the context of African culture, it can therefore be argued that it is not correct to assume that orphans in child-headed families totally lack parenting after the death of biological parents. Second, recognition must be given to the African way of nurturing which, though involving children in household and production processes, prepares them for survival as orphans in child-headed families. The greater challenge nevertheless remains how to innovatively salvage these positive notions in the already over-stretched extended family system.

### **2.3 Child-headed family background and psychological well-being**

When the death of a loved one takes place, individuals may experience a wide range of emotions commonly known as bereavement and grief (Rando, 2004). Grief theorists describe bereavement as the state of having suffered a loss. Bereavement is a distressing but natural and probably universal experience. Grief on the other hand is understood as an incorporation of diverse psychological (affective, cognitive, social and behavioural) and physical (physiological, and somatic) manifestations. Affective manifestation includes depression, despair, anxiety, guilt, anger, hostility and loneliness (Bower, 2005). Cognitive manifestations include pre-occupation with

the deceased, low self-esteem, self-reproach, helplessness, hopelessness, a sense of unreality and problems with memory and concentration.

A study by Chilangwa (2004) found that children in child-headed households also suffer stress in the process of adapting to adult roles and responsibilities of carrying on with minimal resources of the needs of survival parenting and security. Children in child-headed households are at risk of neglect, violence, sexual abuse and other abuses, which lead to psychological trauma. Moletsane (2004) pointed out that the lack of parental guidance, support, and love leaves an indelible mark on the psychological well-being of children in child-headed households. Children who head families struggle with issues such as self-confidence, self-esteem, emotional stability, poverty group sociability and morality. Foster and Williamson (2000) report that children who live in child-headed homes have psychological challenges which include becoming withdrawn, passive or developing sadness, anger, fear and antisocial behaviours.

Children from child-headed households experience additional trauma from lack of nurturing guidance and a sense of attachment which may impede their socialization process through damaged self-confidence, social completeness and motivation (UNAIDS, 2001). Ayieko (2007) also found that the sex of the child, with female children scoring higher than male children, going to bed hungry, a lack of reward for good behaviour, not being in school as well as orphan status were strong influences on the internalising problems. Orphans that lived alone i.e. child-headed households, experienced significantly higher internalising problems, such as depression and anxiety.

Moletsane (2004) reached a general conclusion that the long term mental health of orphans was in jeopardy in the absence of mitigating interventions. A study by Mkhize (2006) in Kwazulu-Natal also highlighted the multiplicity of adult roles that the heads of child-headed households undertake, notably decision making, leadership, economic provision, care giving, conflict management and housekeeping. Children in her study reported that it was stressful to carry these roles. A study of child-headed households in India similarly reported that the adjustment of children into the household head role was very challenging (HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2006).

A study by Masondo (2006) found that role changes and role overload were significant concerns for child household heads. Major roles included being breadwinner, caring for younger siblings on a daily basis, providing emotional support to their bereaved siblings, enforcing discipline and structure in the household and making decisions about the family. All of these roles would previously have been carried by their parents and must now be taken up by the child head of the household. Research has indicated that children who find themselves taking on the responsibilities of heading families struggle with issues such as self-confidence, self-esteem, emotional stability, poverty, health, group sociability, and morality (Donald & Clacherty, 2005). A child-headed household is associated with psychological and emotional trauma, as well as social distress (Germann, 2005). This corresponds with a report which noted that some of the experiences of HIV/AIDS orphans especially as heads of households include the psychological trauma of witnessing their parents' illness and death, dealing with the aftermath of the death of their parents as well as the absence of adult guidance and mentoring including the unmet need for love and security (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010).

Studies documenting general symptomatology of bereavement during childhood have suggested that children's symptoms are similar to those experienced by adult mourners (Rando, 2004). It is highlighted that orphans may not have the opportunity to mourn and grieve properly, as their social environment discourages such behaviour. Nkomo (2006) found that orphaned children not only dealt with grief but also reported high levels of anxiety and depression during their adjustments to the new life situation. However children are generally disadvantaged in this process because of developmental vulnerabilities. A number of risk factors may prevent children from going through the natural grieving process that is necessary to recover from loss. These, among others, include: intellectual immaturity (Rando, 2004; Naug, 2000; Nkomo, 2006), a child's limited capacity to tolerate pain over a period of time (Maqoko, 2006), dependency on caregivers (Tsegaye, 2007), incomplete individuation, and loss of primary attachment (Wolf, 2008).

A study conducted in Ethiopia by Tsegaye (2007) found that child-headed households face tremendous emotional and psychological challenges and live with the constant memory of their dead parents and their prolonged agony and death. He further noted that most of the children feel lonely and depressed from grieving and stress associated with assuming an adult role at a young age. Other associated psychological problems included low self-esteem, fear, and a sense of alienation (Bregg, 2004). Following the loss of a parent can negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved child over time (Makiwane, 2004). For example, a study by Donald and Clancherty (2005) in Kwazulu-Natal explored the life narratives of children in child-headed households compared with adult-headed households. The study found that while most (92%) of the events mentioned by children from child-headed households were negative, only 55% of events mentioned by children from adult-headed households were negative. Furthermore, all child-headed households reported experiencing the death of at least three close relatives, compared with only a couple of the children from adult-headed households. Many of these children seemed not to have dealt with their grief and loss (Bowen, 2006).

Grief is a common feature, given that these children have lost one or both parents, and in the case of child-headed households have often been spurned by other families as well. There is some evidence that children in Africa participate more fully in death and funeral rites than children in the West, a practice which facilitates grieving and thus grief resolution (Luzze, 2002). Nevertheless, Nkomo's (2006) qualitative study in Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal highlighted the central experience of grief among children who were household heads. Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) found that children in child-headed households showed signs of depression which include low self-esteem, exhaustion for prolonged periods, discouragement, helplessness and loss of worthiness. Guest (2011) suggests that the numerous and conflicting roles encountered by children in child-headed households caused tension in their lives which required creative responses to resolve.

Though the loss of parents and the subsequent child-headed family arrangement does negatively impact on all the children, some studies have found that the girl child is more affected than the boy child (Foster & Williamson, 2000). Girls, who in most African communities have to traditionally provide food, shelter and other necessities

often feel helpless and ultimately become vulnerable to drug abuse, alcohol, prostitution and human trafficking and further exploitation and abuse (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). Tsegaye (2008) found that girls heading child-headed families trade sex for their sibling's school fees or to buy food or medicines. This exploitation occurs despite the young age of the children and their pitiable state which should rather have attracted support from exploiters. A lot of these incidences are the result of impoverishment and idleness on the side of the child apart from lack of parental cover. To date, the government and many prominent non-governmental organisations in South Africa have been reluctant to put in place mechanisms to support children to live without adult care-givers on an on-going basis. Instead, their attention has been focused largely on arguing for the provision of substitute parental care, such as institutional care and the promotion of formal and informal foster care. However, this approach is insufficient, and is thus particularly concerned with issues relating to the support (financial and otherwise) of children living without adult care-givers. Under its constitutional obligations to provide social assistance to those who are 'unable to support themselves and their dependants, the government has created three types of social grants aimed specifically at children. These grants are the Child Support Grant; the Foster Child Grant; and the Care Dependency Grant (Chilangwa,2004)

#### **2.4 Child-headed family background and educational outcomes**

Studies have suggested that children from child-headed households are more likely to attend school irregularly when compared to children from normal households. For example, a study in Zimbabwe found that 40% of school age children in child-headed households were not attending school (Walker, 2002). A study in Kwazulu-Natal also found that many children in child-headed households had had to abandon school either temporarily or permanently in order to care for ill relatives or to manage the running of the household (Matseke, 2001). Similar findings are reported in India, where two thirds of child household heads had dropped out of school (HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2006).

Oghuvbu (2010) conducted a study on the attendance and academic performance of students in secondary schools and found that children from child-headed households were more likely to display behavioural problems like late coming to school, truancy,

inability to read and not consulting teachers. The study further suggested that some students develop a negative attitude towards school as a result of poor attendance or absenteeism. As has already been indicated earlier, children in child-headed households do not attend school regularly, and this will affect their performance. Oghuvbu (2010) further reiterated that the relationship between attendance and academic performance in secondary schools is fairly correlated. In other words, attendance influences academic performance.

Apart from the adverse psychological consequences, the child-headed family arrangement has been found to lead to poor education outcomes. For example, a study by Maqoko and Dreyer (2007) found that children who are orphans are unhappy when they are unable to afford items like uniforms and pocket money for school. Beegle, Weerdt, and Dercon (2006) explain that in some schools, teachers identify a number of problems that affect children in child-headed households. Aggressiveness and disruptive behaviour were some of the major problems affecting learners who come from child-headed households; sexual abuse, failure to concentrate in class were some of the problems noted. These children's lives are shaped by inadequate care and support from adults. As a result, they are vulnerable to poverty, malnutrition, diseases, physical and psychological trauma and exploitation.

Matseke (2001) argues that a pupil's achievement is dependent more on their home conditions and social context than on the formal learning at school. He further states that a person with a high intellectual potential may perform poorly because of number of non-intellectual factors emanating from home and physical living condition. Most studies of the effects of orphan-hood on education to date have focused primarily on access and enrolment rather than on educational outcomes and achievements which ultimately affects an individual's ability to succeed in life (Foster & Williamson, 2000). Research that has been conducted on the impact of orphan-hood on educational outcomes has been contradictory (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2007). Some studies suggest that orphan-hood status puts children at a higher risk of dropping out of school, whereas others point to poverty or overall low national school enrolment as the primary determinant of negative educational outcomes rather than the death of parents (Donald & Clacherty, 2005; Foster & Williamson, 2000).

Children from child-headed homes experience inadequate socialization and their poor performance may be attributed to the fact that they have no one to support, encourage and motivate them in their academic work. According to Ritcher and Desmond (2005), parental involvement in schools results in improved pupil attainment and ownership. Without parents, children will not achieve much. Pillay (2006) also noted this when he concludes that, in the absence of parents, children will suffer. Poueslen, (2006) contends that a child must be educated and socialized in the family to enable him to live in social contexts. This affects their education; they may gradually withdraw and finally drop out of school. The result may be unrealisable future dreams for these children. However, contrary reason for poor school attendance was noted in Kenya, where heavy household duties were the reason for non- school attendance by children in child-headed households .

## **2.5 Theoretical framework: Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of social development**

In the present study, the researcher was guided by Erik Erikson's eight-stage psychosocial theory of social development as a theoretical framework. Erikson's (1980) psychosocial theory maintains that the way people think, feel, behave and develop as individuals is linked to their interaction with the social structures, forces and relationships which make up their environment. Development does not just happen to people, but is based on their active engagement with and exploration of their physical and social world (Walker, 2002; Newman & Newman, 2005).

For the purpose of the present study, the focus was on the fifth stage of development namely identity versus role confusion (from about 13–18 years). Erikson suggested that a child who successfully goes through this particular stage is expected to develop a positive sense of identity regarding his or her role in life. On the other hand, failure to do so could lead to what Erikson regards as role confusion. For instance, an orphaned child who is expected to take on the role of a parent may end up having role confusion as he/she is developmentally not ready to be a parent. According to Germann (2005), this is because children do not have the social or the work skills to be able to act as parents. Taking on such an inappropriate role is likely to lead to frustration, anger and a weak sense of self (Germann, 2005; Wolf, 2008 & Luzzi, 2002). The researcher considered Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, and in

particular the fifth stage of identity versus role confusion to be the lens through which children from child-headed families could be understood.

Research has shown that in child-headed households the older adolescent usually takes the place of the caregiver, whose duties are those of a mother and/or a father (Mogotlane et al., 2010). Most of the time, the central challenge is to balance the role of a child with the extra role of being a child-parent. In both child and headed household normal families, the adolescent faces stress from physical maturation, fitting into or dealing with peer groups (peer pressure) and making lasting friends. They wonder who they are and what particular place they should take within their environment.

The major burden on children in child-headed household is how to be 'a good big brother' or a 'good big sister' to the rest of the siblings. No matter what their socio-economic status is, all adolescents search seriously for identity, either as individuals or as groups (Mfono, 2003). In the school environment, the teacher becomes a powerful role model and so is encouraged to be empathetic with all learners. If the life crises are fully or adequately resolved at each stage, then the child might be able to enter into adulthood and move through the other stages without too many difficulties. Erikson`s theory is significant as part of the theoretical framework in this study, as it specifies the experience that some children go through and how each child experiences the impact on their development (Bequele, 2007).

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the methodology employed in this study, and includes a discussion on the research design, population and setting, sampling, data collection and data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. The issues pertaining to the trustworthiness of the findings are also discussed.

### **3.2 Research design**

A qualitative research approach, specifically the phenomenological research design was used in this study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) have pointed out that the purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the experiences of participants regarding a particular event in order to understand the participants' meaning ascribed to that event. This study therefore aimed to describe and interpret the psychological experiences of learners from child-headed families in Mankweng area, Limpopo Province.

De Vos (2001) states that the basis of phenomenology is that there are multiple ways of interpreting the same experience and the meaning of the experience of each participant is what constitutes reality. In this study all of the 10 respondents were given an equal opportunity to describe and narrate their experiences as learners who lived in child-headed household. There were similarities and differences in the experiences of the respondents and these were noted and recorded. According to Groenewald (2004), a phenomenological study is focused on understanding the participants' voice that is the reason why this approach was used in this research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that qualitative research can be employed when one is exploring new territory or new ways of looking at a familiar topic. Therefore, qualitative research allowed the researcher to produce data that is holistic, contextual, descriptive, in-depth and rich in detail. A similar view is expressed by Mouton (2002) who pointed out that the main goal of a qualitative approach is to obtain an in-depth description and understanding of action, events and expression of words.

### **3.3 Population and setting**

The population in the study comprised children aged 16 and 18, living in a child-headed household and were in grades 8-10. The researcher decided on this population group because, in her view, learners in this age group were relatively more senior, articulate, matured and capable of acting independently when compared to those in the lower grades.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified two high schools in Mankweng area. These two schools were chosen on the basis that the researcher was able to access the schools as they were nearer to where the researcher stays. Furthermore, the schools were chosen because as a member of the community where the schools are located, the researcher knew some of the teachers at these two specific schools. This made it easy to gain access and to collect data. The two schools are located in the Polokwane Municipality which forms part of the Capricorn District Municipality in Limpopo Province. Capricorn District shares borders with other local municipalities within Capricorn district like Mopani and Waterberg Districts. It is the largest metropolitan complex in the north and a major economic centre with 38 wards (Statistics South Africa, 2009). The research was conducted in Capricorn District Municipality of the Limpopo Province of the Republic of South Africa. Limpopo Province is one of the nine provinces which is characterized by high levels of unemployment, poverty, escalating crime, xenophobic attacks, child abuse, a fast spread of HIV and AIDS infection amongst youth as well as a huge number of illiterate people, above all these, the low matriculation pass rate. This province is divided into five District Municipalities namely: Vhembe, Greater Sekhukhune, Mopani and Waterberg (See Figure 3.1: Limpopo provincial map). In terms of Limpopo Province's educational management system, Capricorn District (which is the municipality where Mankweng area is located,) is divided into 32 circuits, with a total of 213 secondary schools (Phillips, 2011). The researcher specifically identified two schools in Mankweng area, namely Mamabudusha Secondary School which is situated at Mankweng in the Capricorn District of the Limpopo province. It is found near the University of Limpopo and Hwiti Secondary School is also situated at Mankweng in the Capricorn district of the Limpopo province. The researcher chooses these schools because they mainly use Sepedi as their home language, there are, however, a few schools that use both English and Sepedi. Since the two institutions

are secondary schools, on average the age range of learners varies from 14-22 years, and average enrol more than 700 pupils a year the schools in the circuit are exclusively black in their educator and student complement.



**Figure 3.1: Limpopo provincial map** (Statistics SA, 2011).

### 3.4 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state that purposive sampling or judgemental sampling is a procedure that relies on the researcher's judgement regarding which of the elements within the target population should be part of the corpus. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also indicate that in purposive sampling, the researcher selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest. Mouton (2002) suggests that on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the population, a judgement is to be made about who should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research. According to Marks et al. (2005), sampling is necessary because one cannot include everyone in the study and the sample should be representative of the population.

In the present study, two secondary schools, Hwiti and Mamabudusha High Schools were purposively selected because they were close to the area where the researcher was located. The sample size consisted of ten learners (five learners per school), aged between 16 and 18 years from the two secondary schools. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggest that a typical sample size for a phenomenological research is five to twenty five individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. Based on Babbie and Mouton (2001)'s recommendation, the researcher opted to select the ten learners to participate in the present study. The researcher decided on this population group because, in her view, learners in this age group were relatively more senior, articulate, matured and capable of acting independently. Furthermore, in selecting the participants, the researcher had to recognise the provisions of the Section 137 of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 which stipulate that the provincial head of the Department of Social Development may recognise a household as a child-headed household if:

- a child over the age of 16 years has assumed the role of caregiver in respect of the children in the household;
- it is in the best interest of the children in the household.

Based on these provisions, children over the age of 16 years who are from child-headed families are allowed to give consent over their siblings or themselves. Similarly, the researcher in the present study considered the consent from older siblings.

### **3.5 Data collection instrument**

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, Section A covered the biographical details of the participants and Section B factual information about child-headed household with variables under investigation. An interview schedule was constructed in such a way that it was in line with the objectives of the research (see Appendix 1a Interview guide - English version, and Appendix 1b Interview guide - Sepedi version) the instrument consist of 3 open-ended questions. Mouton (2002) pointed out that researchers use semi-structured interviews in order to gain a detailed picture of the respondent's particular topic. Similarly, the researcher in the present study decided on the semi-structured interviews in order to provide the researcher and the respondent much more flexibility than the conventional structured interview.

Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) suggest that semi-structured interviews are less formal and the use of this method is flexible and useful for gaining insight into people's personal beliefs and perceptions. The use of semi-structured interviews also provided an opportunity to get to know people closely and gain insights into how they feel and think. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher constructed an interview schedule. This schedule acted as a guide and a reminder during the interview. This allowed the researcher to remain free to enquire more deeply into particular areas to follow the priorities and concerns of the interviewees, who could introduce topics the researcher had not thought of Smith (1996).

### **3.6 Data collection procedure**

Smith (1996) indicates that the interviewer or the researcher is responsible for the collection and analysis of data. Thus as a researcher one had to develop listening and empathy skills. The interview method helped the researcher since she was dealing with emotional processes and personal issues. During the interviews the researcher worked with her participants to arrive at the heart of the matter. She listened closely as her participants described their experiences as learners from child-headed homes. The researcher was very watchful regarding cues in her participants' expressions, questions and occasional side tracks. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) also suggest that a typical semi-structured interview looks more like an informal conversation. The researcher therefore made sure that the participants did most of the talking while she did most of the listening. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher was careful to suspend any preconceived notions or personal experiences that would unduly influence on what she heard the participants saying.

The researcher always kept in mind the suggestions by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) that during the interview the researcher must begin the conversation with a small talk that can break the ice. The researcher was also courteous and respectful to her participants all the time. During the interviews she showed genuine interest in what the participants said. She did this through body language like smiling and eye contact. The interviews were conducted after school to avoid interrupting the learners in their studies. Mouton (2002) explains that it is a critical issue in every research that respondents should grant informed consent before participating in the study. Before the interviews, the researcher explained the nature of the research and that

participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. The participants were therefore informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any point if desired. In addition, they were informed that they could choose not to respond to any questions during the interview if they felt threatened, intimidated or uncomfortable. Confidentiality was also discussed with the participants before they participated in the study. Data was captured by use of tape recordings and written notes, in accordance with Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) recommend that the events recounted and experiences described are made more substantial and real through recording.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

In the present study, the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method was used to analyse the data. With this approach, the aim is to offer insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon. Usually these phenomena relate to experiences of some personal significance such as a major life event or the development of an important relationship (Smith & Eatough, 2006). Similarly, the researcher in the present study sought to understand and describe the lived experiences of learners from child-headed families. Specifically, the following steps as recommended by Smith and Eatough (2006) were followed:

#### **Step 1: Reading and re-reading**

The first step of an interpretative phenomenological analysis involves immersing oneself in some of the original data. The transcript is read a number of times, the left-hand margin being used to annotate what is interesting or significant about what the respondent said. It is important in the first stage of the analysis to read and re-read the transcript closely in order to become as familiar as possible with the account. Each reading has the potential to throw up new insights (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

#### **Step 2: Connecting the themes**

The emergent themes were listed on a sheet of paper, and connections between them were identified. So, in the initial list, the order provided was chronological, it was based on the sequence with which they came up in the transcript. The next stage involves a more analytical or theoretical ordering, as the researcher tried to make sense of the connections between themes which are emerging. This form of

analysis is alliterative and involves a close interaction between the reader and the text (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

### **Step 3: Grouping themes together as clusters/ continuing the analysis with other cases**

A single participant's transcript can be written up as a case study in its own right or, more often, the analysis can move on to incorporate interviews with a number of different individuals. One can either use the themes from the first case to help orient the subsequent analysis or put the table of themes for participant 1 aside and work on transcript 2 from scratch. Whichever approach is adopted, one needs to be disciplined to discern repeating patterns but also acknowledge new issues emerging as one works through the transcripts. Thus, one is aiming to respect convergences and divergences in the data recognizing ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

### **Step 4: Tabulating themes in a summary table/ writing up**

The final section is concerned with moving from the final themes to a write up and final statement outlining the meanings inherent in the participants' experience. The division between analysis and writing up is, to a certain extent, a false one, in that the analysis will be expanded during the writing phase. This stage is concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

## **3.8 Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research has often been criticized for being subjective and therefore hard to replicate. Thus, findings are sometimes considered to be lacking reliability. Reason and Rowan (1981) assert that validity in qualitative research lies in the emphasis on the personal encounter with the experience and encounter with persons. Another critique often launched against qualitative research is that it is subjective, thus running the risk of projection and collusion that may have a negative impact on both reliability and validity of the study. Craftsmanship is an important tool in qualitative research as it ensures validity and safeguards against imposition by the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Craftsmanship is described as the researcher's qualification, his/her competent observation and the ability to accurately record and transcribe the data. In this study, the interviews were recorded. The tapes were played and recorded word

for word. The transcripts were read over a couple of times to get the gist of the data. Small summary notes were then written on the margins of the prescribed interviews. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) refer to this process as the trustworthiness of the procedure whereby the raw data are transcribed into manageable data and results.

*3.8.1 Credibility:* In qualitative research, credibility is maintained by an inquiry that ensures that the subject is accurately identified and described (De Vos, 2002). The researcher adequately placed boundaries around the study, by adequately stating the parameters such as the variables, the population and theoretical framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

*3.8.2 Transferability:* Transferability refers to the applicability of one set of findings to another context (De Vos, 2002). In this study, the researcher used multiple methods of data collection namely, interviews and recordings. This has led to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities and it can be viewed as a way of strengthening the study's usefulness for other settings.

*3.8.3 Conformability:* Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize the need to ask whether or not the findings of the study could be confirmed by another. The researcher involved two (2) peer researchers to assist with interpretation of the data at different times or location, so as to improve the analysis and understanding of construction of others.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Before the study was conducted, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the University of Limpopo's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 4 – Ethical clearance letter). Permission to do the research in selected high schools in Limpopo, Mankweng circuit was obtained from the head of department (Department of Education, Limpopo Province. The researcher then approached the principals of the two selected high schools. Each principal requested a letter of introduction and this was done. (See, Appendix 3). The letter of introduction also provided information on the study, the research participants as well as how the schools would help with the recruitments of participants. The letter of introduction also provided the details of the researcher and the supervisor's contact details. This was to enable the principals concerned to verify anything that they wanted concerning the research. The

researcher was granted permission to interview the learners by the principals who, in turn, informed the affected teachers. In some cases, older siblings granted permission for the researcher to interview their younger siblings.

The interviews were conducted after school to avoid interrupting the learners in their studies. Mouton (2002) explains that it is a critical issue in every research that respondents should grant informed consent before participating in the study. Before the interviews, the researcher explained the nature of the research and that participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. The participants were therefore informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any point if desired. In addition, they were informed that they could choose not to respond to any questions during the interview if they felt threatened, intimidated or uncomfortable. Confidentiality was also discussed with the participants before they participated in the study.

Since the participants in this study did not have parents and were staying alone, consent forms were obtained from the relatives of the children indicating that minor learners could not participate in the study. In other cases where no relatives were available, the older sibling (if available) signed the consent forms. In extreme cases where older siblings and relatives were not available, the principal gave such consent. This was a highly sensitive area and care was taken not to distress the children.

The qualitative research approach, specifically the phenomenological research design was used in this study. It was pointed out that the purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the experiences of participants regarding a particular event in order to understand the participants' meaning ascribed to that event. Therefore, the research design provided aspects of the descriptive phenomenology. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. It is a procedure that relies on the researcher's judgement regarding which of the elements within the target population should be part of the corpus. Finally, the instrument interviews, their reliability and validity as well as the data collection procedures and data analysis plan were discussed.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented. In the first part of the chapter, the demographic profile of the participants will be presented in the form of a table (See Table 4.1) presented in the table are demographic details of the participants which included Pseudonym of learners interviewed, the learner's gender, age at interview, the learner's living arrangements and lastly their school level, and a narrative. In the second part, the three categories of themes that emerged from the phenomenological explication of the data is presented. These three categories of themes are: a). Circumstances leading to child-headed households; b). Socioeconomic themes category; and, c). Psychosocial themes category. For each of the three categories of themes, the specific themes that emerged will be discussed. For illustrative purposes, a table will be presented to give a brief overview of the different themes (see Table 4.2) presented in the table are categories of themes, and the themes that emerged during the study. The chapter will be concluded by giving a brief summary of the results of the study.

### PART A: DEMOGRAPHICS

#### 4.2 Demographic profile of participants

Table 4. 1: Demographic details

Pseudonym of learner interviewed	Gender	Age at interview	Living arrangements	School level
1. Johana	Female	18	Staying with younger sister (16 years)	Grade 10
2. Paledi	Female	17	Staying with younger sister	Grade 9

			(12 years)	
3. Lethabo	Male	16	Staying with younger sister, (9) and younger brother (12).	Grade 10
4. Olerato	Female	18	Own baby (10 months) 2 younger sisters (11 and 9 years)	Grade 10
5. Nyakallo	Male	17	Staying with two siblings, Younger sister and brother (10 and 12 years)	Grade 10
6. Rearabetswe	Female	18	Staying alone, no other household member	Grade 8
7. Oreratile	Male	16	Staying with two siblings (10 and 7 years)	Grade 10
8. Precious	Female	14	Staying with one sibling (7 years)	Grade 9
9. Reletile	Male	18	Stays with his girlfriend, own child of 7 months	Grade 10
10. Kopano	Male	16	Staying with 5 Siblings 2 younger brothers, 3 younger sisters ( 10,	Grade 10

			12, 7, 14, 9 and 5 years)	
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Table 4.1 shows that sample of this study comprised ten (10) participants who are from child-headed households in Mankweng community. There were 5 males (50%) and 5 females (50%), their ages ranged from 10-18. Participants were included in the sample because of their living circumstances (Child-headed household). Participants were living on their own with their siblings (50% of the participants were 4-5 siblings in a family, (30%) 3 siblings in one family and 10% of the participants were living alone. Eighty percent (80%) of the participants were children who shared their mother but different fathers, (10%) are children whom ended up knowing and living together because their parents were staying with them before their deaths, and this are step siblings. Ten percent (10%) consisted of children who share both parents. In terms of ethnicity, it was found that all 10 participants were Sepedi-speaking. They were all from child-headed household, with ages ranging from 16 to 18 years. The average years spent in child-headed households was 3 years.

**PART B: CATEGORIES OF THEMES**

**Table 4.2: Emerging themes**

Number	Category	Theme
1	Circumstances leading to child-headed households (4.3)	Child-headed households as a result of the death of parents (4.3.1)
		Failure of the extended family to absorb orphaned children (4.3.2)
		Child-headed households as a result of migrant

		labour <b>(4.3.3)</b>
		Life without parents <b>(4.3.4)</b>
2	Socioeconomic themes <b>(4.4)</b>	Financial difficulties <b>(4.4.1)</b>
		Lack of adequate food <b>(4.4.2)</b>
		Lack of scholastic materials <b>(4.4.3)</b>
		Effects of poverty <b>(4.4.4)</b>
3	Psychosocial themes <b>(4.5)</b>	Life without parents <b>(4.5.1)</b>
		Absenteeism <b>(4.5.2)</b>
		Poor scholastic performance <b>(4.5.3)</b>
		Gender based discrimination <b>(4.5.4)</b>
		Risks and psychosocial problems encountered by children from child-headed households <b>(4.5.5)</b>
		Sexual abuse <b>(4.5.6)</b>

		Teenage pregnancy <b>(4.5.7)</b>
		Psychological trauma <b>(4.5.8)</b>
		Coping strategies for learners in child-headed households <b>(4.5.9)</b>

### 4.3. Circumstances leading to child-headed households

This section focuses on the circumstances that led to the establishment of child-headed households. The findings are on what led learners to live in child-headed households. The question on the circumstances leading to the establishment of child-headed households brought various responses from the respondents.

The specific themes associated with this category are as follows: a). Child-headed households as a result of the death of parents; b). Failure of the extended family to absorb orphaned children; c). Child-headed households as a result of migrant labour; and, d). Life without parents

*4.3.1 Child-headed households as a result of the death of parents:* It emerged during the interviews that some of the participants were living in child-headed households as a result of the death of their parents. Though most of the participants could not reveal the causes of the death of their parents, they did however indicate that the parents got very sick and later died. This is reflected in the following extracts:

*“I live alone without my parents because they both got very sick and died in 2009. My mother died in March and only after three months my father also died.” (Lethabo)*

*“I do not know why both of my parents died in the same year. What I know is that they were both very sick. When they died, I decided to stay with my siblings in our parent’s home.” (Paledi)*

*“My father died first then my mother followed after being sick for a very long time.” (Reabetswe)*

Based on the above statements, it does appear that most of the participants were orphaned following a long illness by a parent or both parents. It is however, not clear from the above statements what the cause of the deaths were. What is interesting from the above extracts is the fact that the deaths of the participants seemed to be close to each other.

*4.3.2 Failure of the extended family to absorb orphaned children:* Some of the respondents indicated that the death of their parents left them with no option but to live on their own. They attributed this to the fact that their extended families could no longer absorb them. The following extracts illustrate this:

*“My relatives did not even attempt to stay with us. After the death of my parents my uncle announced that I was old enough to care for my siblings.”(Olerato)*

*“My grandmother had six other orphans that she took care of. She wanted me to stay with her but I realized that I was old enough to stay alone in the house of my parents.” (Precious)*

Based on the above extracts, it does appear that the extended families of the participants could no longer absorb these orphaned children. Despite the fact that the extended family can no longer absorb the orphaned children these children did not want to be separated from their siblings and therefore decided to stay on their own.

*4.3.3 Child-headed households as a result of migrant labour:* The minority of the respondents indicated that they stayed with their mothers only and they left them

saying they were going to look for jobs in Gauteng. Their mothers never came back nor do they support them financially.

*“I do not know the whereabouts of my father. My mother never told me who my father is. I used stay with my mother, but from 2008 I have been staying alone since she went to search for employment in Johannesburg she has never come back.” (Kopano)*

*“My mother is a bad woman. She left me in 2008 saying she was going to Johannesburg to look for a job. She has never returned and I have been staying alone with my younger siblings.” (Reabetswe)*

These statements revealed that some learners live alone because their mothers have gone to look for employment in Gauteng. Child-headed households in some instances are as a result of migrant labour due to concentration of work in the cities.

#### **4.4 Socio-economic themes**

The specific themes associated with this category are as follows: a). Financial difficulties; b). Lack of adequate food; c). Lack of scholastic materials; and, d). Effects of poverty.

*4.4.1 Financial difficulties:* Under this theme various subthemes emerged and these are less access to grants, coping strategies for girls, coping strategies for boys and lack of adequate food.

A minority of the respondents indicated that they were receiving social grants from the government for social support. The majority stated that they were not receiving any financial support and they gave varied reasons.

*“I am not earning any grant. When I contacted the social workers, they keep on telling me that my case will be solved.” (Nyakallo)*

*“I do not have a birth certificate and an ID; as a result, I am not earning any grant. The social workers promised to come back and solve my problem in 2009 up to now.” (Reletile)*

*“When I turned 18 years in grade 2011, my grant was automatically stopped.”*  
**(Kopano)**

The above statements suggest that most children in child-headed homes encounter some financial difficulties. Only a few of the respondents receive the social grant. Most of these children do not receive the social grant mainly because they do not have the required documents or they have reached the cut off age which is 18 years. Although children living in child-headed households are theoretically eligible for one or more grants available it is true that applications are time-consuming, complicated and unsuccessful. It has emerged that some of the children in child-headed households cannot access the grants available because they do not have the required documentation.

*4.4.2. Lack of adequate food:* It emerged in this study that due to economic hardships or financial difficulties, virtually learners in child-headed households do not have adequate food and therefore badly nourished. This is supported by the following extracts from the respondents:

*“Food is a real challenge to me and my siblings. We rely on food from the school. Last year, the situation was better because my younger brother was given left overs at his school. This year, the situation is bad because my brother says there are no more left overs.”* **( Olerato)**

*“I rely mostly on the meal that we eat at school during break. When I go home sometimes there is nothing, I just sleep and wait to eat again tomorrow. I am shy to bring a lunch box to school to carry some left overs as other learners may laugh at me.”* **(Reabetswe)**

*“Last year, I had no challenge of food because every month end our teacher for nutrition used to give us food like beans and meal rice, but now I do not know what has happened. She tells us that she cannot give us now because the food being received by the school is not even enough for the school.”*  
**(Nyakallo)**

*“The grant that I get enables me to buy some food but is not enough for the whole month. When it gets finished, I rely mostly on the food from school.”*

**(Precious)**

Teachers also revealed that learners who come from child-headed households did not have food and were therefore malnourished. When teachers were asked about the challenges that these learners face, they indicated that shortage of food is a major challenge. From the statements above, it does appear that shortage of food is a real and serious challenge in child-headed households. This leads to malnutrition which increases the risk of physical and psychological problems for these children.

*4.4.3 Lack of scholastic materials:* When the participants were asked the question “What aspects of living in a child-headed household would you describe as challenging?” they responded that they had a serious challenge of uniforms. During the course of the study, it emerged that most of the respondents had a serious challenge with uniforms. Only a few had no challenge with uniform at all. The researcher found that most of the learners from child-headed households had no proper uniforms. It’s either the uniforms were too old or were incomplete. Learners without proper uniform expressed their frustration.

*4.4.4 Effects of poverty:* When asked about how living in a child-headed household impacts on their schooling, it emerged that learners in child-headed households live in poverty; they are extremely vulnerable and poor. Under this theme, teenage pregnancy as a result of poverty is also going to be discussed.

*“I am poor and cannot make it at school.” (Relitile)*

*“I do not think that I can pass my matric exam because of poverty. Even when I pass, who will take me to university?” Collins stated: “My situation at home is so bad that sometimes I think that is why I am not passing.” (Nyakallo)*

The above statements show that children in child-headed households live in poverty and they have low self-expectations and low academic self-concept. It has also being

found that poor children come to believe that they are not good at school and this leads to failure. Poor children withdraw and claim not to care about school.

#### **4.5 Psychosocial themes**

The specific themes associated with this category are as follows: a).Life without parents; b). Absenteeism; c).Poor scholastic performance; d) Gender based discrimination; e) Risks and psychosocial problems encountered by children from child-headed households; f) Sexual abuse; g) Teenage pregnancy; h) Psychological trauma and, i). Coping strategies.

*4.5.1 Life without parents:* When the respondents were asked about how life is like without parents, they all indicated that their circumstances were considerably stressful. Their main concern was that no one was there to guide them, supervise them and encourage them and as a result they feel so lonely and stressed.

*“I wish my parents were there for me. Sometimes I feel I need someone to give me the guidance so that I can make right decisions. I always feel that if my parents were there, life would not be like it is today. I am lonely and stressed.” (Oreratile)*

*“There is no one to supervise me at home. I do what I want and I feel it is dangerous. I decide for myself, for example, if I want to go to school or not. If you have parents they can encourage and monitor you. I feel lonely and discouraged.” (Reabetswe)*

*“It is painful when my friends talk about their parents. There are times when I feel lonely and distressed because I have no shoulder to lean on.” (Kopano)*

The above responses show that learners who do not have parents are lonely, stressed and discouraged most of the time. It appears that this situation leads to the children experiencing feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Furthermore, such children live and manage their own activities without the supervision of an adult.

4.5.2 *Absenteeism*: Absenteeism emerged as one of the challenges that learners from child-headed household experience, when they were asked how living in a child-headed household affected their schooling. The respondents gave various experiences:

*“Sometimes I’m too tired to go to school. I sleep late doing my homework. I also have to wash, cook and clean the house. I sometimes fail to wake up early to go to school the following morning because I would be too tired.”* And sometimes *“I have to go and collect my child’s grant and on such days I am absent from school.”* **(Relitile)**

*“It is sometimes very difficult to come to school every day. Sometimes I wake up late I have a lot of work to do. I need to prepare for my younger siblings first and make sure that they go to school. When I finish late I may decide not to go to school because I am afraid of the punishment that the teachers give. So it is better to be absent that day.”* **(Olerato)**

*“I am not absent many times. I only do not go to school when I go to collect my grant.”* And sometimes I become absent when I am doing some part-time jobs like painting houses and I also do gardening for some people to get money for food and other things.” **(Reabetswe)**

*“There are many people building houses in the location these days. I go and make bricks for them. It is a good business and it enables me to have money for myself. I usually do it during weekends but if things are tight I do not go to school; instead, I will go and make bricks.”* **(Lethabo)**

*“In some cases, I do not go to school because I have to do some part-time jobs so that I can have money to buy electricity and food. When I am not at school, I have to look for firewood and sale it so that I can have an income.”* **(Kopano).**

*“I have a child who is always sick. Sometimes I do not go to school if my child is sick. I have no one to take care of my child if he is sick and I cannot live him at the crèche if he is sick.” (Precious)*

*“If my younger brother is sick, I have no option but to go with him to the clinic. He is always sick and sometimes if I do not go with him to the clinic, I stay at home with him until he is fine.” (Johana)*

*“During weekends I usually visit my friends or they come to my place. We usually drink too much and when it is Monday morning I am usually too tired to go to school.” (Kopano)*

*“When my boyfriend visits me and sleep at my place, I cannot go to school the following morning.” and sometimes “my girlfriend decides to come to my house and stay with me. During such days, it is hard for me to go to school.” (Nyakallo)*

The above statements suggest that learners in child-headed households are sometimes pre-occupied with taking care of household duties, and this results in them failing to go to school. This further illustrates that being absent from school can sometimes be as a result of the child having to play a parental role like preparing for their siblings.

Such parental roles can result in lateness for school, which can in turn lead to punishment by the teachers. The above extracts further suggest that children from child-headed households do not attend school regularly because they are sometimes too occupied with the responsibilities of having to generate income to support themselves and their families. Some of the respondents indicated that they feel that burden and associated stress as a result of having to play a parental role. Out of the ten respondents, two indicated that they are absent from school at least once a month in order to collect their grant. Some of the children who participated in the study absented themselves from school because of lack of parental guidance and encouragement. These responses highlight that the absence of parents in these households leave the children vulnerable as there is no one to give guidance. In

other words, in the family to inculcate a sense of responsibility and to ensure that the children regularly attend school.

A minority of the respondents on the contrary, showed some high level of resilience by indicating that they make sure that they go to school regularly despite the challenges they face.

*“It is better to go to school than to be at home the whole day because at school I can eat.” (Precious)*

*“The main reason why I do not want to be absent from school is that I want to eat at school and sometimes I carry the left-over in my lunch box to eat for supper at home.” (Johana)*

*“There is a lot of work for me to do at home, but I make sure that I attend school every day because if I do not go to school, I do not have anything to eat at home. I always go to school so that I can eat.” (Paledi)*

The responses above indicate that to some of the children living in child-headed households, a school meal is important for them. Some of the children chose to be at school every day so that they can have a free meal, and because there is no food at home. Some children in these homes have no choice but to go to school most of the time so that they do not starve at home. Most of these children come to school on empty stomachs. For them coming to school is an opportunity to fill their empty stomachs.

**4.5.3 Poor scholastic performance:** During the course of the study, the researcher asked about the learners' performance. It emerged that poor performance is a challenge that learners from child-headed households face. A minority of the respondents in the study performed well. On the other hand, most of them did not meet the minimum requirements needed to pass a grade. They gave different reasons for their poor performance. When asked about their performance, learners gave various responses.

*"I am not impressed with my performance at school .This is because every day when I come to school, I am tired and I fail to concentrate. I sometimes fall asleep in class as I am totally exhausted during lessons."* **(Reratiloe)**

*"I find it very difficult to concentrate in class. Most of the time, I sleep in class because by the time I come to school I would be exhausted already because I wake up early to prepare for my sibling."* **(Paledi)**

*"I fail to concentrate in class because I am too pre-occupied with the death of my parents."* **(Olerato)**

*"I am too exhausted by the time I come to school. My baby is sometimes crying during the night and I sleep late. The following morning when I am at school, I am either dozing or sleeping."* **(Lethabo)**

*"Most of the time I come to school without eating anything because there will not be anything for me to eat in the morning. Sometimes when I am in class I shiver and feel too weak. I cannot concentrate and I will be wishing if it can be break time so that I can eat food that we are provided with at school. During break, I eat too much and after break I cannot concentrate again because I will be too full."* **(Nyakallo)**

*"All lessons before break are difficult for me. I cannot concentrate because of hunger. I feel dizzy and weak until I eat during break time."* **(Kopano)**

*"To be honest, I come to school on an empty stomach most of the time and I cannot concentrate. All the lessons before break are a disaster for me because I do not understand anything because I will be hungry sometimes I shiver and feel weak."* **(Precious)**

*"It is not easy to learn when your stomach is grumbling. At least lessons after break are better."***(Reletile)**

*“It is very difficult for me to study at home because after eating supper I am too tired to read. More so even if I want to read I do not have a chair and a table to study at.” (Oratile)*

*“Reading at home is a challenge. There is no one to wake me up to study because I am all alone in the house.” (Reabetswe)*

*“It is difficult to do the homework and assignments that we are given by our teachers because I have no one to ask at home. Most of the time I just copy from other learners.” (Lethabo)*

*“I always fail my homework because I do not have anyone to assist me at home and besides I do not have the time to do the homework.” (Johana)*

The above responses suggest that most of the learners in child-headed households fail to concentrate at school. They fall asleep in class and they come to school tired as a result of added responsibilities such as caring for the siblings or performing household chores.

All respondents in the present study stated that their poor performance is a result of hunger. It has also been noted that these learners do not eat anything before they go to school and as a result they fail to concentrate especially before break. However, the situation becomes better after break time when they had a meal provided by the school. Responses from the learners show that their poor performance is partly as a result of failing to concentrate because of hunger. It also emerged in this study that all the respondents indicated that they do not have adequate study time to complete home works and assignments due to the parental roles that they are expected to play.

#### **4.5.4 Gender based discrimination**

It emerged during the study that in child-headed households where there were boys and girls who attend secondary school, girls were more vulnerable than boys as they did most of the household chores when compared to boys. The following extracts reflect this:

*“Most of the times I do most of the work at home. My brother always tells me that it is my responsibility as a girl to do household chores.” (Nyakallo)*

*“My brother always tells me that boys do not sweep, wash and cook. I do everything for him some days he goes to school and I remain at home doing all the work.” (Olerato)*

The statements above reveal that in a child-headed household where there are both boys and girls, the latter do most of the work in the household. Gender-based discrimination seems to exist in these households. Such family arrangements seem to make the girl child more vulnerable

#### *4.5.5 Risks and psychosocial problems encountered by children from child-headed households*

**(a) Risks encountered by girls:** As already indicated before, girls get pregnant and therefore are at a greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The following extracts illustrate this:

*“I have multiple sexual partners because I am trying to survive.” (Precious)*

*“When I decided to become pregnant, I thought the child- support grant would aid me, but I have made a terrible mistake.” (Reabetswe)*

The statements above reveal that girl learners in child-headed households are at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases because they want to survive. It also emerged in this study that some of the girls in child-headed households choose to become pregnant so that they access the child support grant.

**(b) Risks encountered by boys:** During the study, it emerged that one of the risks encountered by boys in child-headed households was the use of drugs so as to help them cope with their stress.

*“I use drugs to forget all my problems. If my father was alive, he would not tolerate this.” (Lethabo)*

*“My friends come to my place with drugs and we use them because there is no parent to stop me from doing this.” (Paledi)*

*“Drugs and alcohol are part of my life because I relieve my stress. If I had parents I do not think that I was going to do this.” (Olerato)*

The statements above show that boys in child-headed households resort to drugs as a way to deal with their stressful life circumstances. All the boys who admitted using drugs indicated that they did so because of their position of disadvantage. The results suggest that boys from child-headed households face a greater risk of drug abuse.

4.5.6 *Sexual abuse*: Most girls who participated in the study disclosed that they have suffered sexual abuse in one way or the other as revealed by the following statement:

*“I do things that I do not want to do. I sometimes sleep with men who promise to give me help. Some of these men take advantage of my situation, they come to me with some groceries and cash and I respond by sleeping with them.” (Johana)*

*“I have a baby not because I wanted to but my boyfriend at that time insisted that I must have a baby to show that I loved him. I was desperate and I agreed. I was afraid that if I refused he would stop supporting me financially. Now I feel cheated because ever since I got pregnant he has disappeared and my baby stresses me.” (Reabetswe)*

*“I have sex with men in return for the financial and material support that they give me. What stresses me most is that some of these men refuse to use condoms, and as a girl I cannot tell a man to use a condom because it shows that I am not honest.” (Olerato)*

*“I become a victim of circumstances. I am an orphan and some men take advantage of me. Sometimes I sleep with old married men because they give me money and other things.”(Johana)*

The statements above depict that sexual abuse is a common problem that affects girl learners who live in child-headed households. It has emerged in this study that sexual abuse is a serious challenge that affects girl learners. This makes them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. This means that children in child-headed households seem to be exposed to physical and psychological health risks that they do not have control over.

*4.5.7. Teenage pregnancy:* It emerged during the study that poverty increases the risk of teenage pregnancy in the girl children. Out of the ten girls who were interviewed in this study, three had children and two of the girls were pregnant during the course of this study. Records on pregnant learners from the two (2) schools confirmed that most of the learners who fell pregnant were from child-headed households.

*“I got my baby because of my situation at home. My boyfriend supported and is still supporting me financially, and therefore, I ended up having a child with him, but it is difficult for me now to concentrate on my studies.” (Precious)*

*“I hate my child because I got him out of desperation to survive. Now I am regretting because it is not easy to have time with my books.” (Nyakallo)*

*“If my parents were there, I was not going to have this baby. Poverty has caused all this.” Sweetness also stated: “If you are hungry, you end up putting yourself in risky and dangerous positions just to have food on the table. This is why I ended up being pregnant.” (Precious)*

From the statements above, it does appear that girls from child-headed households are at risk of teenage pregnancy because of their poor socio-economic conditions. In other words, poverty has a role in perpetuating teenage pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy is high among child-headed households due to poverty teenagers in child-

headed households get involved in unprotected sexual activities as a means to survive their circumstances. The extracts also reveal that the teenagers who become pregnant do not make it at school.

*4.5.8 Psychological trauma:* It emerged in the study that learners face a lot of psychological trauma as a result of living in child-headed households. The traumas that they faced varied from one learner to the other. However, some of the learners indicated that they were traumatized by the death of their parents. The fact that they assume parental role and responsibilities also stressed them. This is verified by the following statements:

*“The death of my parent is in my head daily, especially the way my mother suffered before she died. She was very sick and when she died my hopes for living were shattered. Sometimes when I think of that, I cry even when I am in class. Sometimes I ask God why? I cannot cope with my situation of being a mother, a father and a child at the same time.” (Johana)*

*“I am very disappointed with my mother she is not dead but she has deserted me for the past four years. I live like an orphan but I am not. I am stressed most of times and lonely because I cannot make ends meet.” (Kopano)*

*“I have constant memories of my late parents. I am suffering like this because my parents are late. It is painful when other learners talk about their parents in my presence.” (Nyakallo)*

*“When I look at myself I am nothing because my parents died. I cannot do anything on my own. When I am at home and things are difficult, I just go and sit at my mother’s grave and tell her all my problems and worries and this relieves me.” (Kopano)*

The responses above are an indication that the majority of learners in child-headed households are traumatised by the death of their parents and their living conditions. Learners sometimes cry at school and at home, and this shows they are traumatised by their situation at home and school. It could thus be suggested that children from

child-headed households experience relatively higher levels of psychological and emotional strain as a result of their circumstances.

*4.5.9. Coping strategies for girls in child-headed households:* It has been indicated that only a few of the respondents receive the social grant. All the respondents however indicated that they encounter financial difficulties. Those who are earning the social grant indicated that it was not enough considering the various expenses that they have to cover.

#### **(a) Coping strategies for girls in child-headed households**

Some of the girls in the study indicated that they had to support themselves and their siblings because there is no parent to work and support them. It emerged during the course of this study that both boys and girls encounter economic hardships. Girls were found to be at high risk of sexual abuse and HIV infection. This finding is amplified by the following statements from some of the girls:

*“My boyfriend supports me with cash and most of the things that I need. He sometimes comes to stay with me at my place. During weekends, I sometimes visit him. I have a child with him and he supports me together with the baby.”*

**(Johana)**

*“Life without parents is tough!” There was a long pause at this stage as the respondent started crying. She continued, “I was bewitched last year when I suffered from continuous menstruation. The man that I was going out deserted me; he was everything to me. I strongly believe that his wife bewitched me. My neighbours told me that the wife of my boyfriend bewitched me. (Reabetswe)*

*“I have several boyfriends and older men who give me cash. I have sex with them when they want. I use protection with some of them and others do not want to use condoms. I am not happy with my lifestyle because I know there is HIV/AIDS, but there is nothing that I can do.” (Precious)*

The statements above reveal that girl learners in child-headed homes were being sexually abused because of the financial difficulties that they encounter. It has

emerged that 60% of the girl learners in the child-headed homes have multiple sexual partners who offer them cash and other essentials that they need. These girls end up having sexual relations with older men. There is also high infection rate among girls in child-headed households because of the frequency of sexual intercourse with older men who seduce and lure them with offers of cash, consumer goods and supposed status. Based on the statements above, it does appear that the girls are more vulnerable and likely to adopt negative coping strategies to deal with their challenges.

### **(b) Coping strategies for boys in child-headed households**

On the contrary, boy learners in child-headed households had positive and less harmful means and ways of survival different from girls in the same situation. The following statements show coping strategies for boys in child-headed households.

*“I do some part-time jobs like gathering firewood for selling and making bricks for people who are building their houses. It really helps me because I get something for my upkeep.” (Oreratile)*

*“I have made a contract with a carwash to help them wash cars. There are usually many cars to be washed during weekends. It helps me to have money to do this and that.” (Paledi)*

*“During weekends, I move from one house to another asking for piece jobs like working in the garden and cleaning houses and yards.” (Kopano)*

The above statements indicated that boys in child-headed households also encounter financial difficulties. However, they seem to be having lesser risky experiences when compared to the girl child. For example, boy children were more likely to earn a living by performing relatively safe jobs like working in the garden, washing cars and collecting firewood. It is evident from the extracts above that boys do not engage in prostitution like girls as a survival mechanism and are less vulnerable to sexual abuse by adults.

*“Since 2011, I have never had school shoes. The pair that I used to wear is now too small, so that is why I wear these slippers (showing off the red*

*slippers). What frustrates me is that teachers always tell me to buy proper school shoes. Where on earth will I get them? I also do not have a school bag. I use a plastic bag to carry my books.” (Oreratile)*

*“I do not feel comfortable with my school uniform especially my school trousers; it is now old and small. I do not have school shoes and a school jersey. In winter, I wear my own brown jersey and others wear blue school jerseys. I feel bad when some of the teachers tell me to bring a school jersey. I do not also have a school bag.” (Kopano)*

*“Sometimes teachers will punish me for not having the school jerseys and shoes. Last year, a certain business man donated shoes to our school for orphans and poor children like us. Unfortunately, I did not get my size. Another thing that frustrates me is that I do not have a school bag. I use a plastic bag.” (Johana)*

The above statements show that learners in child-headed households do not have adequate school shoes, jerseys and bags. This seemed to result in embarrassment on the part of the children from the child-headed households. Learners also expressed their desperation at rigid uniform requirements from the teachers.

Although learners in this study admitted that they do not pay school fees, they did however express their frustration at not having money for educational trips undertaken by schools and also not having pocket money like other learners who have parents. This is amplified by the following extracts:

*“Yes we do not pay any fees but it is so frustrating when a school organizes a trip and you cannot go. Last year, I cried when other learners went to Durban, but I could not go. I did not have money to go.” (Nyakallo)*

*“It is painful when you see others buying a quarter and you do not have money to buy also.” A quarter refers to a quarter loaf of bread at school stuffed with polony, cheese, chips and achar. (Precious)*

#### **4.6 Concluding remarks**

This chapter described, presented and analysed mainly the results of unstructured interviews that were conducted with learners who live in child-headed households in Mankweng, Limpopo Province. Therefore, the results obtained in this study reflected the schooling experiences and challenges that learners in child-headed households face. In some instances, there were similarities as well as differences on the information provided by participants. It can be concluded that learners from child-headed households face some terrible schooling experiences. The findings indicated that the responsibility of a household is extremely difficult to learners who live in child-headed households and this presented challenges that have an impact on their education. It was found out that children from child-headed households are prone to abuse, sexual illnesses and risks of teenage pregnancy. It does appear that some community members also take advantage of their situation and leave the children feeling helpless. For example, some learners from child-headed households felt that they were constantly teased and called names. These unpleasant experiences appeared to lead to lowered self-confidence and a tendency to avoid going to school because of feelings of shame.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the researcher discusses the results in the context of existing literature. Three main categories of themes emerged from this study. These are: a). Circumstances leading to child-headed households; b). Socioeconomic themes; and, c). Psychosocial themes.

#### **5.2: Circumstances leading to the establishment of child-headed households**

As indicated in the previous chapter, the following sub-themes in this category emerged: Child-headed households as a result of the death of parents; b). Failure of the extended family to absorb orphaned children; c). Child-headed households as a result of migrant labour; and, d). Life without parents.

It emerged during the course of this study that some of the respondents indicated that they lived in child-headed households as a result of the death of their parents. These learners did not reveal the causes of the death of their parents. However, they all mentioned that the parents got very sick and later died. It shows that most of the learners who come from child-headed households have lost both of their parents. It is not clear whether the parents died of HIV and AIDS or not because none of the respondents mentioned that. Only one can assume that the “long illness” that they mentioned could be as a result of HIV/ and AIDS. This assumption could be true and lends support to the results of a study by Phillips (2011) who found out that HIV and AIDS is a major factor leading to the establishment and increase in the number of child-headed households in Southern Africa.

Most of the children in child-headed households lost their parents, and the extended families could not absorb them. A few of children in child-headed households opted to live on their own despite the invitation by the extended family members to stay with them. This finding is consistent with Sun & Li (2001) study which found that the extended family is being eroded by the HIV epidemic, with relatives no longer available to cope with the rising number of HIV and AIDS orphans. Some of the children in child-headed households were abandoned by their parents either as a

result of the migrant labour system. This finding is consistent with the results of a study by Foster and Williamson (2000) who found out that child-headed households in some instances are as a result of migrant labour occasioned by the concentration of work in the cities

Life without parents is perceived by all the participants as difficult their main concern was that no one was there to guide them, supervise them and encourage them and as a result they feel so lonely and stressed. This finding is supportive of Tsegaye (2007)'s finding that children without parents are lonely and distress because they are deprived of mental security as well as crucial emotional security. Furthermore, such children live and manage their own activities without the supervision of an adult. Sloth-Neilsen (2004) also agrees with this finding as he also found out that these children experience feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. They are lonely and empty and as a result they have a desire for a fulfilling life and a fear of the unknown.

### **5.3 Socio economic themes**

As indicated in the previous chapter, the following themes in this category emerged: a) Financial difficulties; b.)Lack of adequate food; c.)Lack of scholastic materials; and, d.) Effects of poverty.

*5.3.1 Financial difficulties:* In the present study only 4 out of 10 children were found to be receiving the social grant. Most of these children do not receive the social grant mainly because they do not have the required documents or they have reached the cut-off age which is 18 years. This finding confirms the findings by Phillips (2011) who discovered that although children living in child-headed households are theoretically eligible for one or more grants available it is true that applications are time-consuming, complicated and unsuccessful, some of the children in child-headed households cannot access the grants available because they do not have the required documentation. Meintjies (2010) also found out that, child-headed households have less access to income support through social grants. This finding is in agreement with that of Tsegaye (2008) who also found out that the response by the social workers in this regard is too slow or non-existent.

*5.3.2 Lack of adequate food:* It was revealed that learners who come from child-headed households suffer from lack of food and were therefore malnourished. When teachers were asked about the challenges that these learners face, they indicated that shortage of food is a major challenge. This finding is consistent with the results of studies by Daniel and Matthias (2012); Sloth-Neilsen (2004) who all found out that, due to financial difficulties, children in child-headed households do not have adequate food and consequently become malnourished.

*5.3.3 Lack of scholastic materials:* The researcher found out in this present study that most of the learners from child-headed households had no proper uniforms, school shoes, jerseys and bags. It is either the uniforms were too old or were incomplete. Some of the girls' shirts and skirts were worn out as well as the trousers and shirts for boys. The learners also indicated their embarrassment at being without the proper uniform. The findings of the present study agrees with the findings by Meintjies et al. (2010) who found out that school uniforms presented a further hurdle in accessing schooling for children living in child-headed households. However, in the present study there were no reports of learners who were sent home and told not to return until they obtained the proper uniform.

*5.3.4 Effects of poverty:* In the present study learners in child-headed households live in poverty; they are poor and vulnerable, and as a result, they have low self-expectations and low self-esteem. They believe that they are not good at school and this leads them to fail. This finding agrees with Wolf (2008) who found out that poor children withdraw and claim not to care about school. Also the findings by Houser (2009) agree with the finding of this study that poverty can have a severe effect on the child's performance at school.

#### **5.4 Psychosocial themes**

As indicated in the previous chapter, the following themes in this category emerged:

a) Absenteeism; b).Poor scholastic performance; c) Gender based discrimination; d) Risks and psychosocial problems encountered by children from child-headed families; e) Sexual abuse; f) Teenage pregnancy; g) Psychological trauma and, h). Coping strategies

*5.4.1 Absenteeism:* Absenteeism emerged as one of the major challenges that learners from child-headed households experience. This is illustrated in the fact that children in child-headed households are sometimes too occupied with taking care of household duties. Consequently, they may fail to go to school. It has also emerged during the interviews that some learners from child-headed household sometimes absent themselves from school because of doing part-time jobs. This finding is in agreement with the results of a study by Sloth-Neilsen (2004) who found that in child-headed households, the opportunity cost of children's time is very high because it may mean that the child needs to work or stay at home to take care of household duties. Snider (2006) also found that absenteeism tended to reduce attendance rate among children who are heads of households.

*5.4.2 Poor scholastic performance:* The present study found that poor performance is a challenge that learners from child-headed households face. However, a minority of the respondents in the study performed well. On the other hand, most of them did not meet the minimum requirements needed to pass a grade. They gave different reasons for their poor performance. Most of the learners in child-headed households fail to concentrate at school. They fall asleep in class and they come to school tired as a result of added responsibilities such as caring for the siblings or performing household chores. This finding lends support to earlier studies that have found that concentration at school is often difficult for learners who live in child-headed households (Ritcher & Desmond, 2005).

The present study further found that one of the reasons for poor performance of children in child-headed households is hunger. Learners revealed that hunger affects their concentration and ultimately performance at school. The results of the present study are consistent with results of an earlier study by Snider (2006) who found that children in child-headed households were vulnerable and most likely to show signs of hunger. He found out that that hunger often leads to lack of concentration, falling asleep in class and this ultimately resulted in poor concentration and poor performance at the end. The results of the present study also concur with the study by Germann (2005), and Pillips (2011) who found out that children who live in child-headed homes struggle with performance due to hunger.

*5.4.3 Gender based discrimination:* It emerged during the study that in child-headed households where there were boys and girls who attend secondary school, girls were more vulnerable than boys and they did most of the household chores as compared to boys. In a child-headed household where there are both boys and girls, the latter do most of the work in the household. Gender-based discrimination exists in these households. This finding lend support to an earlier study by Tybazayo, (2009) who found out that girl children are especially vulnerable in the emergence of child-headed households. They do most of the chores in the household.

*5.4.4 Risks and psychosocial problems encountered by children from child-headed families.*

**(a). Risks encountered by girls**

In the present study, a number of girls reported that they got pregnant and therefore were at a greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. This finding is in agreement with that of Wild (2001) who suggested that children in child-headed households especially girls are at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases from economic coping strategies involving sexual behaviour. It also emerged in this study that some of the girls in child-headed households choose to become pregnant so that they can access the child support grant. This finding lends support to an earlier study by Makiwane (2004) who found that girls in child-headed household had no choice but to give up their youth life to be parents in order to get access to the government grant to support their siblings and themselves.

**(b). Risks encountered by boys**

In the present study, it emerged that one of the risks encountered by boys in child-headed households was the use of drugs so as to help them cope with their stress. The findings of this study suggest that boys in child-headed households tend to resort to drugs in the belief that drugs would relieve their stress. All the boys who admitted that they use drugs indicated that if they had parents they were not going to stress, and therefore they would not use drugs. This suggests that boys from child-headed households face risks of drug abuse. This finding is consistent with the results of a study by Zamani and Yolana (2007) who found out that child-headed households turn to alcohol in their distress and this has further detrimental effects

upon their education. Child-headed households also experience problems of alcohol and drugs and as a result they are at a greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

*5.4.5 Sexual abuse.* In the present study most of the girls revealed that they had suffered sexual abuse in one way or the other. It has also been revealed that sexual abuse is a common problem that affects girl learners who live in child-headed households. The present study further found that sexual abuse is a serious challenge that affects girl learners. This makes them vulnerable to HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. This finding is consistent with the findings of studies by UNAIDS (2004) which showed that children in child-headed households are subjected to sexual abuse because of the absence of adult guidance and mentoring. Similar results were also reported by Phillips (2011).

A study by Mfono (2003) suggests that teenagers in child-headed households live a reckless life. Some of them tend to have sex with older men so that they can get money they need for survival. There is a strong relationship between poverty and teenage pregnancy. As a result of poverty, girls in child-headed households involve themselves in unprotected sex and as a result face the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and AIDS, gonorrhoea and other related diseases. Sloth (2004) suggested that poverty causes teenagers to fall pregnant. Teenagers who become pregnant in schools perform poorly because of the dual role of being a mother and a learner. The situation is so stressful and school attendance is also disturbed. Poverty in child-headed households plays a major role in exacerbating teenage pregnancy.

*5.4.6 Psychological trauma.* The present study found that some learners face psychological trauma as a result of living in child-headed households. The traumas that they faced varied from one learner to the other. However, some of the learners indicated that they were traumatized by the death of their parents. The fact that they assume parental role and responsibilities also stressed them.

This finding is consistent with the results of a study by Ogina (2010) who found out that children without parents are usually traumatized by their parents' death, which is

then followed by a change in their conditions. These learners sometimes cry at school and at home, and this shows they are traumatized by their situation at home and school. Similar findings were reported by Phillips (2011) who found that children living in child-headed households experience a strong longing for their parents and as a result they experience a higher level of psychological and emotional strain. It also emerged that in a child-headed household, learners suffer stress as a result of failing to adapt to role and responsibilities. Tsegaye (2007) found that learners in child-headed household stress as a result of adapting to adult roles and responsibilities.

## **5.5 Coping strategies for learners in child-headed households**

*5.5.1 Coping strategies for girls in child-headed households:* From the findings of the present study it has been indicated that only 4 out of 10 children of the respondents receive the social grant. All of the respondents however, indicated that they encounter financial difficulties. Those who are earning the social grant indicated that it was not enough considering the various expenses that they have to cover. Some of the girls in the study indicated that they had to support themselves and their siblings because there is no parent to work and support them. It emerged during the interviews that both boys and girls encounter economic hardships. Girls were found to be at high risk of sexual abuse and HIV infection. This finding agrees with Tsegaye (2007) who suggests out that as a result of desperation, a number of girls end up as prostitutes. This finding lends support to results of earlier studies. For example, a study by Booyesen and Banchman, (2003) found that there was high infection rate among girls in child-headed households because of the frequency of sexual intercourse with older men who seduce and lure them with offers of cash, consumer goods and supposed status.

*5.5.2 Coping strategies for boys in child-headed households:* On the contrary, boy learners in child-headed households had other means and ways of survival different from girls in the same situation. The present study found that boys in child-headed households encounter financial difficulties. It was further found that the means of survival by boys from child-headed households are relatively safe. For example, the study found that a number of the boys tended to work in other people's gardens for

cash. They would also engage in other activities like washing cars and collecting firewood in order to generate some money. It is evident from the findings of the present study that, unlike some of the girls, boys do not engage in prostitution and other risky sexual behaviours. This finding contradicts the results of an earlier study by Booyesen & Bachman, (2003) who suggested that, due to financial difficulties, the boys may join armed groups to make their way to the streets to look for employment.

### **5.6 Implications of the results for theory**

As it was already pointed out earlier, the present study used the fifth stage of Erik Erikson (that is, identity versus role confusion) as a lens through which to understand and describe the experiences of children from child-headed households. Erikson's theory is significant as a theoretical framework in this study in the sense that it specifies the experiences that some children face and how each child experiences the impact on development. In identity versus inferiority, which is the fourth developmental stage, occurring from about six years to twelve years the child is expected to learn rudimentary skills via formal education (Hjelle & Ziegler, 2009). The child develops a sense of industry and learns the reward of perseverance and diligence (Booyesen & Arntz, 2002). The child at this stage is ready and willing to learn about and to use tools, machines and methods in preparation for adult work (Wolf, 2008). The child also becomes socialised and in this regard society meets these tendencies of the child by creating opportunities for learning and co-operation (Meyer, Moore & Desmond, 2003). The child learns some skills and starts to become socially competent at this age (Booyesen & Arntz, 2002).

The fifth stage, identity versus role confusions (from about 13–18 years), requires the child to be able to identify his or her role in life. It is argued that if confusion arises, the child takes on the role of parent as well as sibling and does not have his or her own childhood identity problems arise. Children, do not have the social or the work skills to be able to act as a parent thus are likely to become frustrated, angry and have weak sense of self (Germann, 2005). As soon as the child has developed sufficient intelligence and capacities for work, it is important that s/he applies what s/he has learnt to specific situations in order to prevent feelings of inferiority and regression of the ego (Wolf, 2008). Work in this sense may include many and varied forms, such as attending school, doing chores at home, assuming responsibilities at

school and at home, and learning work-related skills. It is thus important that the child applies his or her intelligence and energy to carry out work-related tasks. Watching and learning methods provides the child with an overall sense of quality for what needs to be done (Luzze, 2002). Orphanhood however, may deny children of parental love and the emotional nurturing needed for these developmental stages which are likely to impact negatively on their psychosocial development and academic progress.

Research has shown that in a child-headed household the older adolescent usually takes the place of the care giver whose duties are that of a mother and a father (Lewis & Daly, 2000; Ward and Eyber, 2009). Most of the time the central challenge is to balance up one's role as a child and the extra role of being a child parent. Taking such a responsibility at an earlier age does negatively affect such a child. Similarly, the present study found that the elder sibling automatically tended to take on the parent role. This was found to be a source of frustration for such an affected child.

This study has raised quite a significant number of issues pertaining to be more negatives of the orphan crises than positives in the learning of affected children because quite a number of the child-headed learners expressed situations of incapacitation. A lot still has to be done in order to empower the learners in a child-headed household. Therefore, there is need for more in-depth studies on the topical issue of child-headed learners and psychosocial development", not only in South Africa but many more states in and outside Africa, for example India, Romania, Rwanda, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and other countries that are still developing but have already noted an increase in the number of child headed households due to the devastating effects of the dreaded disease, HIV/AIDS. Such studies may help to unveil some of the predicaments in which we find minors after the death of both their parents.

## **CHAPTER 6 : SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 Summary**

The aim of the present study was to explore the lived experiences of learners who come from child-headed families. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To describe the meanings that learners attach to their status as members of child-headed families;
- To determine what learners from child-headed families consider as their challenges; and,
- To determine the psychological strategies that learners from child-headed families use to cope with the demands associated with their environment of relative deprivation.

The following three categories of themes were identified: a). Circumstances leading to child-headed households; b). Socioeconomic themes category; and, c). Psychosocial themes category. Each of the three categories yielded a number of themes. There were nine psychosocial category themes that emerged from the data. These among others included the following: a). Poor scholastic performance by learners from child-headed families; b). Increased levels of sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy for the girl child; and, c). Psychosocial trauma. With regard to coping strategies, the study found that girls tended to engage in risky sexual behaviour as a way to access financial support and to cope with their challenges when compared to boys who tended to engage in more positive behaviour like garden work in order to earn a living.

### **6.2 Limitations**

Whilst there are significant findings that were made, there are a number of limitations that are identified in this study. These are:

- Firstly, there is a possibility that the status of being an orphan from a child-headed family might have raised fears, consequently leading to the possibility of the participants being inhibited and not sharing their full experiences. Initially, the researcher noted some degree of mistrust and expressions of fear

for the unknown from the participants. To curb this limitation, the researcher made sure that the participants were assured of confidentiality and that there would be no harm arising from their participation in the study. The issue of signed consent and assent forms remained vital from the beginning.

- Secondly, translating the interview data from Sepedi to English also served as a limitation because translating the interview data from Sepedi into English may have led to omissions or inappropriate substitutions of the original material provided by the learners from child-headed families, sometimes one tends to lose the real meaning and emotions from the participants. However, getting a language expert helped overcome this limitation.
- Thirdly, the sample size used for the present study was small to make any generalisations beyond the sample itself. However, the researcher notes that this is a qualitative study whose main thrust was to explore the experiences of the participants. Consequently, there was no intention on the part of the researcher to generalise the findings from this study to the broader South African population.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Learners from child-headed households should receive counselling support from school based support teams that includes professional counsellors. This recommendation is made in view of the psychological trauma that is associated with the status of being an orphaned child from a child-headed family. The Department of Education should employ at least one professional counsellor per school to offer professional counseling to learners who live in child-headed households.
- In providing this psychosocial support, special consideration should be given to the orphaned girl child who is more vulnerable to psychosocial risks when compared to a boy child from a similar family background.
- Community support centres be established in order to support learners from child-headed families with after-school care, meals and recreational activities.

- There is a need for community forums to be established and to prioritise the safety of their neighbourhoods in order for all children to feel appreciated and safe in their environments.
- The Department of Social Development should also continue to provide the support grant to learners who have reached the age of 18 who live in child-headed households as they still need care and support.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1(a): Semi-structured Interview Guide (English version)**

The interview guide should have three questions that are developed in such a way that they will clearly seek to respond to the research objectives that your study intends to achieve

1. In your own words, describe to me what it means for you being a member of a child-headed family household
2. Describe to me the challenges that you have faced and continue to face as a member of a child-headed household.
3. Share with me what you consider as the strategies that you use to cope with your experiences as a member of a child-headed family.

## **APPENDIX 1(b): Semi-structured interview guide (Sepedi version)**

1. Ka mantšu a gago, mpotše gore go ra go reng mo go wena go tšwa lapeng leo hlogo ya lona e lego ngwana.
2. Bjalo ka ngwana yo a tšwago lapeng leo hlogo ya lona e lego ngwana, hlaloša mathata ao o kilego wa ba le ona, le oa o tšwelago pele go ba le ona.
3. Anke o nhlalošetše ka mekgwa yeo o e dirišago gore o kgone go fenyathata a o tšwelago pele go ba le ona go tšwa lapeng leo hlogo ya lona e lego ngwana.

## APPENDIX 2(a): PARTICIPANT CONSENT LETTER AND FORM

Department of Psychology

University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus)

Private Bag X1106

Sovenga, 0727

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear participant

Thank you for demonstrating interest in this study that focuses on “The lived experiences of learners from child-headed families in Mankweng area, Limpopo Province”. The aim of the present study is to explore the lived experiences of learners who come from child-headed families

Your responses to this individual interview will remain strictly confidential. The researcher will not attempt to identify you with your responses to the interview questions or to disclose your name as a participant in the study. Please be advised that participating in this study is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time.

Kindly answer all the questions and reflect your true reaction .Your participation in this research is very important. Thank you for your time

Sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_

Mothapo Mathaba (Masters student

\_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: Prof T Sodi

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

**CONSENT FORM**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby agree to participate in a Masters’ research project that focuses on the lived experiences of learners from child-headed families in the Mankweng area, Limpopo Province. The purpose of the study has been fully explained to me. I further understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can withdraw my participation in this study at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project, whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally. I understand that my details as they appear in this consent form will not be linked to the interview schedule, and that my answers will remain confidential.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2 (b): Participants consent letter – Sepedi version

Depatemente ya Psychology

Unibesithi ya Limpopo (Turfloop campus)

Private Bag X1106

Sovenga, 0727

Letšatšikgwedi \_\_\_\_\_

Dumela motšekarolo nyakišišong

Ke leboga ge o bontšhitše kgahlego go tšea karolo nyakišišong ye e lego mabapi le go nyakišiša ditsela goba mekgwa yeo bana\ baithuti ba go tswa malapeng ao a hlokago batswadi

Diphetolo tša gago mo go nyakišišo ye di bolokegile. Monyakišiši a ka se leke go lebanya diphetolo tša gago le dipotšišo tša nyakišišo goba a tšwetša leina la gago nyanyeng bjalo ka motšekaralo mo nyakišišong ye. Le lemošwa gore go tšea karolo mo nyakišišong ye ke boikgethelo ebile le na le tokelo ya go tlogela go tšea karolo nako efe goba efe.

Araba dipotšišo ka nnete yeo e phatlaletšego. Dikarabo tša gago di bohlokwa ebile di bolokegile.

Ke leboga nako ya gago

Wa gago ka mehla

\_\_\_\_\_

Mothapo Mathaba (Morutwana wa masetase)

\_\_\_\_\_

Prof. T. Sodi (Mohlhli)

\_\_\_\_\_

Letšatšikgwedi

\_\_\_\_\_

Letšatšikgwedi

**Letlakala la tumelano leo le swanetšego go saenwa ke motšeakarolo nyakišišong**

Nna \_\_\_\_\_ ke dumela go tšea karolo Porojekeng ya nyakišišo ya Mastase

Ke hlaloseditšwe go tla seatla ka ga maikemišetšomagolo a nyakišišo ye. Go tšea karolo ga ka ke boithaopo nyakišišong ye, ka fao nka tlogela nako efe kapa efe. Ke kwešiša gore se ke nyakišišo dithutong, ebile ga go seo ke se humanago go tšea karolo nyakišišong ye. Ke kwešiša gape gore seo ke se bolelago mo, se tla šomišwa fela ke bao ba dirago nyakišišo ye fela, ebile tsebo ya ka e bohlokwa. Nyakišišo ye e tloga e bolokegile.

Mosaeno: .....

Letšatšikgweedi : .....

### **APPENDIX 3: PERMISSION LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Department of Psychology  
University of Limpopo  
Private Bag X1106  
Sovenga  
0727  
Date:

The Circuit Manager  
Department of Education  
Capricorn District  
Private Bag X  
Polokwane  
0700

#### **RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CAPRICORN DISTRICT**

My name is Mathaba Mothapo, a Masters student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus). I am conducting a study on: The exploration of the psychological experiences of learners brought up in child-headed families in Mankweng area, Limpopo Province. The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of learners who are brought up in child-headed families.

I do hereby apply to be granted permission to conduct this research in the following two schools in your circuit, namely: (Hwiti Secondary School and Mountain View Secondary School). It is important to point out that the researcher undertakes to maintain confidentiality regarding the identity of the participants in this research project. The participants will be assured about the voluntary nature of this study and further that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to do so. The methods of data collection will be unstructured individual interviews with the learners who come from child-headed families.

Sincerely

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Mathaba Mothapo  
Masters Student

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Date

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Prof T Sodi  
Supervisor

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Date



**University of Limpopo**  
Department of Research Administration and Development  
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 2212, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:noko.monene@ul.ac.za

**TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS  
COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**MEETING:** 06 May 2015

**PROJECT NUMBER:** TREC/25/2015: PG

**PROJECT:**

**Title:** Exploration of the psychological experiences of learners from Child-headed families in Mankweng Area, Limpopo Province  
**Researcher:** Ms MC Mothapo  
**Supervisor:** Prof T Sodi  
**Co-Supervisor:** N/A  
**Department:** Psychology  
**School:** Social Science  
**Degree:** Masters in Psychology

  
**PROF. TAB MASHEGO**

**CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

**Note:**

- i) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.
- ii) The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.  
**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.**

## Appendix 5: Approval letter for permission to conduct research



**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries: MC Makola PhD, Tel No: 015 290 9448 .E-mail: [MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za](mailto:MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za)

UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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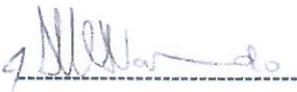
MATHABA MOTHAPO

**RE: Request for permission to Conduct Research**

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"THE EXPLORATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS BROUGHT UP IN CHILD-HEADED FAMILIES IN MANKWENG AREA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE"**.
3. The following conditions should be considered:
  - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
  - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the schools concerned.
  - 3.3 The conduct of research should not anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
  - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.
  - 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

- 3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.
4. Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.
  5. The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.



**Mashaba KM**

**Acting Head of Department.**



**Date**