

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FEMALES RAISED BY SOCIAL FATHERS: A
CASE OF DRIEKOP COMMUNITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Katlego Magdeline Rantho, declare that this dissertation is my own work and that all sources that I have quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Date

DEDICATION

I, Katlego Magdeline Rantho, dedicate this dissertation to my late father, Jouseph Rantho; my husband, Frans Matlakala, and my daughter, Keitumetse Boipelo Hosiamé Rantho – without them, this project would not have succeeded. Thus, this dissertation is dedicated to them with unconditional love.

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ABSTRACT

The number of children growing up in stepfamilies is rising globally. This rise is accelerated due to parental remarriage following divorce, death or immigration. Undeniably, children growing in these newly formed stepfamilies remain susceptible to enormous challenges at the hands of their stepparents, most particularly young females. Amongst other challenges, these children may experience psychological, emotional, and academic challenges. The aim of this study was to describe the lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers in the Driekop community in the South African Limpopo province. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and utilised a phenomenological research design to obtain first-hand information from the research participants. The research targeted young black females raised by social fathers in Driekop community in Limpopo province. Seven participants were sampled using the purposive sampling technique, which falls under the non-probability sampling methods. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, and the data was analysed using an inductive thematic analysis method. The study found that young females raised by social fathers suffer from psychological challenges, such as feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, a lack of sense of belonging, fear of abuse, and being unable to speak about their challenges. It was also established that these young females are discriminated against, and that they lack their mothers' support when they raise the challenges that they face due to the presence of their social fathers. To cope with these challenges, the young females resort to seeking support from their significant others, pray, and/or use substances, such as alcohol to numb the pain. This study recommends educational campaigns that could assist both young females and social fathers in adjusting to the new living circumstances. The study also recommends awareness campaigns to educate and encourage young females to report any form of abuse by their social fathers.

Keywords: Challenges; Coping Mechanism; Lived Experience; Psychological; Social Father; Young Female.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

“Families don’t have to match. You don’t have to look like someone else to love them.”

Leigh Anne Tuohy

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Parenthood is at the centre of a child’s wellbeing. When determining parental custody of a child in South Africa, the child’s wellbeing is of paramount concern (Republic of South Africa, 2005). Typically most children are placed in their mother’s custody. Mabelane, Makofane, and Kgadima (2019) confirm that majority of children are placed in the custody of their mothers rather than their fathers. Several factors, such as divorce or death, typically result in children being placed into the custody of one of their parents. However, there is little research on the psychological well-being of children who are raised by single parents in South Africa (De Wet-Billings, 2023).

Recent studies have found that although both male and female children experience the consequences of separation from their biological parents, young female children experience more challenges than young male children experience (Graham, 2010; Utami & Lentari, 2022). Other researchers (Keelson, 2021; Wilson, 2001) posit that young female children who have been separated from biological parents are at a higher risk of being sexually abused by their mother’s new partner or new partner’s friends. Additionally, Klaus et al. (2012) assert that in some situations, young females experience difficulty in accepting their stepfathers due to various factors, such as living in fear of being abused. For example, the daily reporting of cases in which women and children are raped and killed can instil fear in a female child when introduced to a stranger as her new father. However, Debowska et al. (2020) state that many parents may be unaware that their marital breakdown and separation puts their young female child at risk of sexual and physical abuse, and this unawareness magnifies the problem.

The researcher was motivated by Mboniswa (2018)'s study titled "*Experiences of growing up as a stepchild for young adults at university level: a qualitative approach*". After reading the study, the researcher noted that there was a lack of literature describing the lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers in South Africa. The researcher was additionally motivated to explore this topic because many South African communities fail to recognise the significance of social fathers in the development of young females (Freeks, 2017). In other words, many families tend to avoid considering the consequences for young females growing up without a father figure. Furthermore, Cowan and Cowan (2019) discovered that policymakers are neglecting the problems that children encounter in stepfamilies; this can extrapolated to young females.

1.2 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.2.1 Social father

The term 'social father' refers to a man who is not the biological parent of a child, but who maintains or assumes all parental responsibilities for that child (Lobaka 2017; Nathane & Khunou, 2021). In the context of this study, this definition was adopted, and the term 'social father' was used interchangeably with 'stepfather'.

1.2.2 Young female

In this study, the term 'young female' refers to a stepdaughter between the ages of 18 to 24. Moreover, the term, 'young female', was used interchangeably with the term 'children' because some of the young females narrated their childhood experiences.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The number of children growing up in stepfamilies is rising globally. (Ganong & Coleman, 2018; Golombok & Tasker, 2015; Pryor, 2020). According to Graham (2010), the separation of biological fathers and their children is a growing trend due to high rates of divorce, death, remarriage, or a father's decision to be absent in a child's life. As this situation escalates, step-parenting is becoming more prevalent, and children are being raised by stepparents. Almost a decade ago, Klaus et al. (2012) reported that almost half

of the children in the United States lived with stepparents, particularly children below the age of 18 years. However, the researcher could not find statistics of children living with stepparents and their experiences applicable in the South African context.¹ Graham (2010) claims that stepparents are usually male because children are typically taken to live with the mother after separation, as mothers are considered to be all-encompassing caregivers. In light of this, Jensen and Shafer (2013) established that when arrangements to introduce children to new stepparents are made, parents disregard their children's feelings and opinions and how the new situation affects them.

The researcher has noted with keen interest that many researchers focus on the implications of stepmothers on children, modelled on the evil stepmothers in the Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel fairy tales, but novels by William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens have proved how stepfathers can be equally toxic to their stepchildren (Debowska et al., 2018). According to Pullman et al. (2019) and Adjiwanou, Boco, and Yaya (2021) new living arrangements with the introduction of a stepparent can affect stepchildren in various ways, such as having to split time and share their mother with the new member of the family. However, there is an absence of literature on the impact that stepfathers have on the lives of their stepdaughters. What has been documented is the fact that when a biological father is present, young women tend to do well at school, experience few behavioural problems, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviour (Debowska et al., 2020). Internationally, researchers such as Braithwaite et al. (2018) and Kodero and Kimani (2021) have established that young females raised by their social fathers tend to isolate themselves, become antisocial, behave aggressively, experience emotional breakdowns, and find their new living arrangements unpleasant. Whilst international studies indicate that young females are faced with a number of psychological problems when raised by social fathers, little is known about this phenomenon locally.

¹ The researcher performed a systematic search using the databases PubMed and Science direct with the keywords **(Statistics OR estimates AND young females OR adolescent* AND staying OR living-with AND stepparents OR social fathers AND experience)]. The researcher applied a filter of 10 years with no language restrictions.**

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 Aim

The aim of the study was to describe the lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers in the Driekop community in the Limpopo province of South Africa.

1.4.2 Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To identify psychological challenges faced by young females raised by social fathers;
- To determine the coping mechanisms that young females use when raised by social fathers; and
- To appraise the influence of social fathers on young females' school performance.

1.4.3 Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the psychological challenges faced by young females raised by social fathers?
- What are the coping mechanisms that young females use when raised by social fathers?
- What is the influence of social fathers on young females' school performance?

1.5. STUDY LAYOUT

This study has five chapters and is organised as follows:

Chapter 1: General orientation of the study

This chapter orientates the reader to the problem presented and describes the aim and objectives that anchored this study.

Chapter 2: Literature and theoretical review

In this chapter, the researcher presents the literature that is aligned to the study objectives, and presents the theoretical framework that is used to discuss the study findings

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The researcher presents the methods that were used for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4: Presentation, analysis, and data interpretation

In this chapter, the researcher provides the reader with the empirical data that emerged during data collection. The findings are presented and discussed in a synchronised manner.

Chapter 5: Summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations

In this chapter, the researcher details the study's main findings and provides recommendations that are aligned to the study's findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITRATURE AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

“Fatherhood requires love, not DNA.”

- Unknown

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the challenges that young females encounter when raised by social fathers. This review will cover topics that include, amongst others: the developmental expectations of young females raised in normal situations; the experiences of young females raised by social fathers; the influence of social fatherhood on a young female’s education; the challenges stepfamilies experience; and intervention strategies when problems arise.

2.2. DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS/TASKS OF TEENAGERS IN A NORMAL SITUATION

Adolescence is the developmental phase that occurs between childhood and adulthood. According to Bell (2016), the adolescence stage is a developmental phase that is distinguished by biological, cognitive, physical and psychological maturation. In this stage, adolescents acquire knowledge on decision making and actively contribute towards their life being (Iftikhar et al., 2016). However, Lundberg (2020) posits that there is no clear boundary to the adolescent stage, instead claiming that adolescence begins at 13 years for girls and 14 years for boys. This suggests that adolescent starts at the onset of puberty, and this varies for girls and boys.

During the adolescence phase, teenagers repeatedly engage with their environment, which significantly affects their behaviour. McNeely and Blanchard (2010) specify the type of engagement, citing engagement with their familial, institutional, informal, and virtual surroundings and add that such engagement renders an opportunity for development or derailment, and at times both. Most adolescents experience confusion at this age and seek to establish their identity, which typically creates conflicts between themselves and their parents (Bell, 2016). Branje (2018) adds that parent-teenager conflicts during this

transformational stage arise out of attempts to negotiate relational changes and expectations that both parents and teenagers have. Branje (2018) also states that hormonal changes in teenagers induces autonomy and independency, which provide an opportunity for maturation and equal relationships. Moreover, the adolescence stage is considered a sensitive period in a teenager's life, as they are prone factors such as stress, drug use, alcohol abuse, and various mental disorders (Lundberg, 2020).

2.3 AN INTRINSIC OVERVIEW OF THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FEMALES RAISED BY SOCIAL FATHERS

The phenomenon of social fathers is on the rise globally. There are various factors that contribute to children being raised without both of their biological parents. For instance, Perry and Fraser (2020) and Turunen (2014) found that previously death contributed significantly to children being raised by social fathers but of late children are raised by social fathers due to divorce. As a result, there is a chance for either partner to remarry and form a new family. Jensen et al. (2017) established that American statistics indicate that one third of children grow up with stepfamilies before they reach 18 years of age. Whilst Adjiwanou et al. (2021) claim the figure is higher in sub-Saharan Africa, where over 50% women embark on relationship journeys with new partners five years after their break-ups, leading to a new family structure for their children. Indisputably, both the concepts of remarriage and children growing up in stepfamilies are familiar to South Africans. This assertion is supported by Greeff and Cloete's (2015) earlier findings in which they claim that South African marriage and divorce statistics changed significantly between 2002 and 2008 and decreased in 2011. Moreover, Greeff and Cloete (2015) discovered that about 4.7% males and 3.2% females remarried in 2011. The formation of these stepfamilies bears challenges and requires all family members to adjust to new living environments, with the impact thereof being most severe for the children. Willis and Limb (2017) found that while adjusting to new living arrangements, young females are more susceptible to various challenges that range from behavioural changes to emotional distress, and poor academic performance.

The notion of social fatherhood is common in most countries, including South Africa. According to Makofane (2015), social fatherhood encompasses a variety of relationships that children can have with the new male figures in their lives. Similarly, Van den Berg and Makusha (2018) and Mayaba (2020) propose that social fatherhood is a phenomenon that describes the role played by male figures known as social fathers, who are not biologically related to their new partner's children. In other words, social fatherhood is a form of a social condition that exists in an environment in which children grow up without their biological fathers. In addition, Durnell, Dlamini and McDougal (2018) confirm that social fathers may also be men such as grandfathers, uncles, and stepfathers who assume the fathering role, regardless of whether or not they live with the children. For instance, in most South African communities, uncles play the role of a father to their brothers' children if their brother dies. This is supported by earlier studies by Amos (2013) who highlighted the African proverb '*ngwana asewa mmelegi fela*', which means that the duty of caring for a child is not only to the domain of the biological parents, but spreads to extended relatives and community members. In the context of this study, the concept of 'social fathers' is used interchangeably with the term 'stepfather' to describe men who are the young female's mother's romantic lovers, regardless of their living arrangements.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ATTACHMENT THEORY

According to Adom et al. (2018), a theoretical framework grounds a research study to a theoretical construct and describes a plan for executing a study with the intention of making research findings meaningful and acceptable. Moreover, Adom et al. (2018) claim that when a study lacks a theoretical framework, readers struggle to ascertain its position in academia, rendering it less likely to contribute to the development of knowledge. A theoretical framework helps to shape the vision of a study. It outlines the plan of how a researcher intends to execute their study philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically (Osanloo & Grant, 2014). This suggests that a theoretical framework works as a base structure on which components of research, such as the study rationale, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions are built. Additionally, Akintoye (2015) and Kivunja, (2018) emphasise that a theoretical framework provides space for researchers to validate their opinions in

data analysis, using theories of researchers with deeper knowledge. In this study, the researcher chose the Attachment Theory as the lens through which the phenomenon of young females raised by social fathers would be studied.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory is mainly used in developmental psychology, since it maintains that human beings are born with the need to form a close emotional bond with their (Smith, Cameron, & Reimer, 2017). The emotional bond is often established in the child's first six months of life, and this is the period in which social fathers are typically not present in the child's life. Bowlby proposes that the theory serves to protect the individual from harm and to regulate negative emotions that arise due to a harmful event (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013). In the context of this study, the researcher sought to understand young females' perceptions of the strategies their social fathers used to protect them from any harmful events. For Gillath, Karantzas and Fraley (2016), Attachment Theory is most commonly used when researchers attempt to understand interpersonal relationships, and in this context of this study, the interpersonal relationship between social fathers and young female stepdaughters. This theory is ideal for use in this study, as the researcher was able to gain insight into young females' emotional reactions after their parents' separation. Moreover, this theory helped the researcher to explore how parental relationships affect young females.

The Attachment Theory is relevant to this research study due to its ability to describe the relationship between parents and their children. Human beings are born with the desire to love and be loved, and they consider primary caregivers to be their source of comfort and protection from harm. George (2014) reiterates that the attachment bonds that children create in their first three years of life are important for their lifespan development, and at this age children are vulnerable to attachment distress when separated from their parents. Additionally, Crouch (2015) asserts that the separation of children from their primary caregivers causes children distress and determines their behaviours as adults. In this context, the researcher used the Attachment Theory to understand how young females deal with the absence of their biological fathers whilst negotiating new attachment bonds with their social fathers. Researchers in the field of fatherhood

acknowledge the importance of the bond between an infant and their caregiver, but add that the child's development is also influenced by the ongoing relationship between these parties (Jain, 2015).

Bowlby envisioned four different attachment styles, which are the key tenets of the Attachment Theory. His vision was invigorated by the idea that the security that children develop in infancy plays a critical role in how these children engage with other individuals into adulthood (George, 2014). Earlier, D'Arienzo (2019) and Jones 2015 interpreted each of these attachment styles as follows hereunder.

2.4.1 Secure attachment Style

Secure attachment refers to a child's capacity to develop secure and loving relationships with others. Children with this attachment style believe that they are knowledgeable, deserve to be respected, and they perceive other individuals to be kind, helpful, and supportive. In the context of this study, the researcher referred this style to understand how the absence of biological fathers in their daughter's early years of their lives affects their interaction with their new father figures, that is, their social fathers. The researcher as also able to identify relational complications that stepfathers and stepdaughters experience whilst living together.

2.4.2 Anxious-Avoidant Attachment Style

The Anxious-Avoidant Attachment Style is characterised by the fear of being neglected. Children with an anxious-avoidant attachment struggle to manage stressful situations effectively, they are reluctant to seek help, and withdraw easily. In addition, George (2014) propose that because of their antisocial traits, children with an anxious-avoidant attachment find it difficult to form relationships with others. For example, these children are inclined to be aggressive, lie, and bully their associates. In this study, the researcher sought to understand how the earlier presence of their biological father in their lives from the childhood phase influences stepdaughters' inability to share their distresses with stepfathers/social fathers during young adulthood.

2.4.3 Anxious-Resistant Attachment Style

Anxious-Resistant Attachment is characterised by a fear of intimacy. Children with this attachment style struggle to get close to their peers and prefer spending time with their primary caregivers, leading to social isolation. In this study, the researcher sought to understand the reasons for stepdaughters isolating themselves from their stepfathers. The research also sought to ascertain how the introduction of stepfathers in the later stage of a stepdaughters' life affects her perception of becoming close to the stepfather.

2.4.4 Disorganised Attachment Style

Disorganised Attachment Style is a combination of both the anxious and avoidant attachment styles. White et al. (2019) maintain that children with a Disorganised Attachment Style long for affection but want to distance themselves as far as possible from it. In other words, children with this attachment style have difficulty perceiving other people as support systems rather than threats. In this context, the researcher sought to understand the how young females view their social fathers.

2.5 PREVALENCE OF SOCIAL FATHERHOOD

The prevalence of social fatherhood is caused by many factors. Social fatherhood results from divorce or the incapacity of men to marry the mother of their children (Makofane, 2015; Seward & Stanley-Stevens, 2014). In other words, children of divorced or unmarried parents often find themselves being raised by external male figures. Considering this, Mayaba (2020) confirms that the role of social fathers is complex and often influenced by cultural practices, such as the payment of damages to the family of the impregnated woman. In support, of this assertion, Rantho and Matlakala (2021) emphasise that maternal families deny biological father's access to their children due to the father failing to pay child support. As a result, children find themselves being raised by social fathers and lacking relationships with their biological parents. Despite the plethora of studies on the importance of fathers, there is a dearth of information on the influence of social fathers in their stepchildren's lives. In a study conducted on fathers, several participants reported that although the absence of their biological fathers has affected their development, they still acknowledge the role played by their grandparents,

uncles, and men in the neighbourhood in fulfilling this role (Mayaba, 2020). In addition, Mavungwana (2021) postulates that social fathers are known to contribute enormously to the lives of children and are recognised as important figures in their stepchildren's lives due to their constant participation and contribution to the wellbeing of their stepchildren. However, the negative aspects of social fathers' presence should not be downplayed. With that said, Utami and Lentari (2022) state that a social father's presence can potentially provoke negative outcomes, such as violence and harassment in the stepchildren's lives. Young females raised by social fathers should be carefully observed so that they do not manifest any hidden anger experience caused by social fathers' abuse or violence.

2.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG FEMALES

The formation of stepfamilies can either reinforce or diminish the bond of pre-existing families. According to Segal et al. (2015), evolution has influenced social parenting in that social parents have evolved with the inclination to serve their biological children rather than their unrelated children. In other words, parents give their biological children rather than their non-biological children first preference in the distribution of love, care, and resources by parents as opposed to non-biological children. As a result, non-biological children experience various hardships and challenges. For Segal et al. (2015), the chances of abuse and maltreatment are higher for children being raised by genetically unrelated parents as opposed to children being raised by their biological parents. This is often because social parents feel less guilt and are less attached to these children, which means they are unlikely to sympathise with them. In support of this assertion, Dodo and Nyoni (2016) established that some social parents in the Shona communities fight with their stepchildren over inheritance issues and they are described as being jealous, hostile, and abusive to their stepchildren. In this case, some young females look at social fathers and see them as opportunists, especially if the social fathers are unemployed. This section will details the psychological challenges that young females raised by social fathers face, and then focuses on three subthemes, namely mental disorders, behavioural changes, and emotional problems.

2.6.1 Mental disorders

Mental disorders are illnesses characterised by a change in a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and they affect a person's ability to function in significant areas of functioning, such as family, school, or work (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). There is insufficient information regarding the statistics of children suffering from mental disorders in stepfamilies, and the gender of those children that are affected is not clarified. It is two decades since Lebow (2005) claimed that girls, as opposed to boys, experience difficulty in adapting to new living arrangements with social fathers. However, there are several studies conducted on children living in traditional families as opposed to those living in non-traditional families. For instance, Perales et al. (2017), propose that children who grow up in the presence of a non-biological parent are at a greater risk of suffering from mental disorders as opposed to children growing up with their biological parents. In this context, Mboniswa (2018) states that some mental disorders, such as anxiety, are triggered by stepparents' authoritative behaviour. In other words, when a stepparent starts controlling their stepchild's behaviour, they evoke anxiety in the child. It is during this period that young female started experiencing mental health challenges.

Research conducted on a blended family found that children who stay with their mother and a social father (in comparison to children rising with their mothers only) experience difficulty in adjusting to the new family living arrangements and experience conduct problems (Behere, Basnet & Campbell, 2017; Mboniswa, 2018). Similarly, Perales et al. (2017) emphasise that results from studies conducted using diagnostic interviews reveal that children who are raised in non-traditional families are likely to develop internalised and externalised disorders. These disorders include attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorder, depressive disorders, bipolar disorders, conduct disorders, emotional disorders, aggression, hostility disorders, as well as schizophrenia (Perales et al., 2017). In addition, Behere et al. (2017) aver that some children are suffering from low birth weight, physical and/or mental disabilities, aggression, and hyperactivity at the hands of their social fathers. Furthermore, Jensen and Lippold (2018) draw attention to the fact that youth coming from stepfamilies are more prone to poor psychological distress, as they suffer

from depression and self-esteem issues. This suggests that children's overall mental health tends to be at higher risk in the presence of stepparents.

2.6.2 Behavioural and emotional changes

Family plays a critical role in children's behaviour and their overall development. According to Adjiwanou et al. (2021); De Figueiredo and Dias (2012), the family system plays a significant role in child's primary socialisation, meaning that parents are responsible for introducing children to appropriate ways of conducting themselves. In other words, it is the parents' duty to equip their children with knowledge about the values, beliefs, and acceptable behaviour prior to their worldly interactions. Thus, poor primary socialisation determines the child's behaviour inside and outside the family. In support of this claim, Crisogen (2015), and Bardi et al. (2017) affirm that a child's psychosocial development depends on the quality of primary socialisation, because children who are properly socialised can comprehend life outside the family. This suggests that children from stable family backgrounds with less negative behaviours are likely to exhibit positive behaviours in comparison to children from unstable family backgrounds. This is supported by Warui et al. (2021) who confirm that children observe and imitate the behaviour of their attachment figures, in this case their parents.

Children may develop various behavioural and emotional problems when living with a stepparent. This assertion is supported by Perales et al. (2017) who postulate that children in stepfamilies are prone to protracted socio-emotional development and their behavioural problems are externalised. For instance, children in stepfamilies may exhibit behavioural issues such as physical aggression, verbal bullying, relational aggression, defiance, and vandalism. In corroboration, Jensen and Lippold (2018) found that children coming from stepfamilies display negative behaviours such as aggression, violate laws, abuse drugs, and experience problems in the school environment. In addition, Mboniswa (2018) emphasises that children living in stepfamilies experience developmental problems and are vulnerable to engaging in sexual activities at a young age and having children out of wedlock. In addition to experiencing behaviour changes, Mboniswa (2018) maintains that parents fail to reprimand these children due to their own feelings of guilt

and a false notion that children are bound to behave in a negative manner in stepfamily circumstances.

Children's behaviours and emotions can be triggered by the phenomenon of parental remarriage. According to Jensen et al. (2017), emotional problems such as stress in stepchildren are caused by disconnection and co-parenting conflicts. In other words, poor child-parent relationships place children at a higher risk of developing stress as opposed to children who have close child-parent relationships. For instance, when a stepfather is introduced into a family unit, biological mothers may shift focus from their children due to nurturing a new relationship with their partner, leading children to emotional implications for children. In support of this assertion, Adjiwanou et al. (2021) and Mboniswa (2018) reiterate that parents in stepfamilies usually exhibit fewer positive emotions and often neglect their children due to focusing on stepfamily challenges.

2.7 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL FATHERS ON A YOUNG FEMALE'S SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Family structures can adversely affect a child's academic performance. Academic performance is defined as "performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university" (Steinmayr et al., 2014:24). According to Mbatsane (2014), studies conducted on family structure and school performance demonstrate that children growing up in the presence of both biological parents perform better than children living with in other family arrangements. Perales et al. (2017) similarly emphasise that children living in non-traditional families have reduced cognitive abilities, which affects their reading, vocal abilities, mathematical skills, as well as their overall academic results. Whitney et al. (2017) conducted a study on six different categories of fathers fathering children from the 7th to the 12th grade and established that teenagers living with stepfathers have a higher chance of failing their grades, than their counterparts living with a biological father. Furthermore, Njoroge and Kirori (2018) underscore that there is a negative correlation between children school performance and family dynamics in the United States and Sweden. Additionally, these authors Njoroge

and Kirori (2018); and Čvorović (2022) reveal that adverse academic performance is mostly evident in children living with stepfathers. Considering that most research is focused on developed urban areas, it is of paramount importance to explore the influence of stepfathers on the academic performance of children growing up in rural communities, such as Driekop.

Diminished stepfather participation in stepchildren's schooling leads to high rates of failure. Mbatsane (2014) asserts that transitioning to stepparent families is difficult for both parents and children, especially if stepparents are uninvolved in the children's lives. This suggests that children are susceptible to a variety of academic challenges when living with a neglectful or uninvolved stepfather. For instance, stepfathers who fail to meet their stepchild's basic or emotional needs destroy their stepchild's ability to excel in school. Additionally, Whitney et al. (2017) highlights that one of the most notable reasons for academic failure is a child's inability to accept their biological parents' separation. In their study, Whitney et al. (2017) established that when children comprehend that their biological fathers have abandoned them and that their stepfathers are uninvolved in their lives, they often find themselves in conflict with their stepfathers. Furthermore, Adjiwanou et al. (2021) established that adolescents raised by stepfathers are more likely to experience discrimination in schools than younger children raised by stepfathers. Rudenok et al. (2022) discovered that in comparison to older children, primary school children aged seven to 11 find it easier to form attachment bonds with stepfathers and develop respectful, trustful, and open relationships.

2.8 SOCIAL FATHERS' ABUSE OF YOUNG FEMALES

Young females in stepfamilies are not spared from abuse by their social fathers. Abuse is defined as another person's behaviour that causes physical, emotional, or sexual harm to an individual (Fayaz, 2019). In other words, abuse is the harmful action/s from parents, guardians, caregivers, or family members that threaten a child's overall development. For example, abuse can range from talking to a child in an inappropriate manner to a physical beating. Strydom et al. (2020) stipulate that child abuse is an issue of significant concern but is often neglected because people perceive it as 'normal'. In most cases, the child

goes unreported. This is supported by Debowska et al. (2020) who found that about 4-16% children suffer from physical abuse, 10% experience psychological abuse, 1-15% endure child neglect and sexual abuse, which is underreported.

The increasing number of unreported cases might resonate well within a culture of silence. Rapholo (2019) highlights the fact that child abuse in the Bapedi tribe is unreported due factors such as fear, ubuntu practices, socio-economic status, connection to the offender, as well as the protection of the family name. For example, families often protect a child molester because they are the financial supporter. Al-Saadoon et al. (2021) found that youth in Arab and Gulf countries acknowledge that they have been sexually abused at least once. Thus, it can be deduced that children are afraid to report violations by stepfathers due to the financial contribution the stepfathers make to their family.

2.8.1 The risk of abuse in young females

Some social fathers pose a greater risk of abuse in children. Schneider et al. (2017) claim that children raised by social fathers are susceptible to an increased risk of abuse because social fathers are not emotionally devoted to their non-biological children. The researcher does not ignore the fact that child abuse may arise out of a poor child-rearing context and inconsistent attention from mothers. But it goes without saying children raised by social fathers suffer 10 to 20 times the maltreatment experienced by children raised by their biological fathers (Behere et al., 2017). In addition, Lobaka (2017) confirms that some children are physically abused by their social fathers and emotional abused by observing their social father abusing their mother.

Participants Lobaka's (2017) study shared that they had been sexually, physically, emotionally, and verbally molested by their social fathers as well as his friends. The participants did not report the perpetrators because they feared not being believed, ruining the family, and losing financial privileges. Moreover, Debowska et al. (2020) emphasises that most mothers tend not to believe their children when they claim being abused by their social fathers. In this regard, it is assumed that some mothers might be viewed as abuse enablers because they try to protect their relationship with the social

father at the expense of their child's wellbeing. Aymer (2021) confirms this, citing the situation where the mother of a girl who child reported her social father for molesting her, convinced her daughter to avoid saying bad things in court that could lead to her partner being convicted and going to jail. This points to a broken support system for children who experience abuse at the hands of their social fathers, and this may result in lifetime implications for these children.

2.8.2 The repercussions of abuse on young females

Childhood maltreatment typically has a lifetime effect on abused individuals. The abuse of children is associated with negative psychological and behavioural problems such as low self-esteem, poor self-concept, antisocial behaviour, depression, isolation, poor academic performance, and diminished ability to understand different roles (Nyarko et al., 2014). This shows that the abuse of children in stepfamilies is linked to adverse short- and long-term outcomes. Behere et al. (2017) found that many children who have experienced abuse at a young age struggle to parent adequately and display aggressive behaviour towards their own children. For instance, the abused child's parent's own emotions may escalate during the period of their children's destructive behaviour. Thus, Nobes et al. (2022) found that social fathers, who had themselves been abused, display insecure and disorganised attachment tendencies, making it difficult for them to open their hearts to their stepchildren. Some young females end up being abused because their social fathers experience a moment that triggers their own childhood abuse (Sasan et al., 2022). This indicates that the home environment that children are raised in significantly influences their future perspectives.

2.9 THE CHALLENGES FACED BY STEPFAMILIES AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

The prevalence of challenges faced by stepfamilies and intervention strategies available to them is often overlooked. Brimhall (2020) found that there is a definite need to develop intervention programmes to alleviate the challenges that children face when growing up in unstable families. Pedro, Altafim and Linhares (2017) concur, stating that to achieve optimum development outcomes for children, preventive intervention programmes should

revolve around improving knowledge and parenting skills, offering support to parents, and presenting strategies that will effectively lessen child abuse and neglect. For instance, intervention programmes should be created with a focus on educating parents and stepparents on the importance of using methods of discipline that are child-friendly. However, there is a lack of literature on the role played by psychology professionals in reducing the challenges faced by stepfamilies, particularly with regard to children. This is supported by Papernow (2018a) who states that although there is vast research aimed at fighting the challenges faced by stepfamilies, there is still a lack of programmes that offer training on stepfamilies. As a result, psychology professionals fail to understand the patterns of interactions within stepfamilies and rely on first time family models, which leads them to offering inappropriate interventions. Brown (2020) avers that stepfamilies receive inadequate support from community members and are often not involved in intervention strategies. With that said, Brown (2020) maintains that more clinicians should receive training on how to deal with the challenges faced by step/blended families.

Despite the discrepancies in stepfamily interventions, offering psychological help to stepfamilies remains the duty of psychologists/therapists. This is supported by Papernow (2018b), who envisioned three phases to providing therapy to stepfamilies, namely: psycho-education phase (educating stepfamily members on what can or cannot work); interpersonal phase (creating a connection amongst stepfamily members); and intrapsychic and intergenerational phase (healing wounds created by the stepfamily). On the other hand, Papernow (2018a) postulates that educational programmes focusing on marriage and parenting should offer an active and cost-efficient approach to distressed individuals. In other words, psychologists should increase public stepfamily education to assist people in understanding their family dynamics. Papernow (2018a) further states that these professionals should not only dwell on general relationship education, but should also offer education that focuses on challenges that stepfamilies face. Brown (2020) claims that the lack of education provided to many counselling professionals about stepfamilies leads counsellors to use intervention strategies created specifically for nuclear families. In this regard researcher is of the view that therapists and clinicians should not neglect stepfamilies because it is necessary for these families to learn how to

form new attachment and familial bonds that carry various expectations as well as responsibilities.

2.10 THE IMPLICATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGY ADDRESSING CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG FEMALES

Growth in the discipline of psychology galvanised various subspecialties with different scopes of practice. Amongst these subfields are clinical psychology, medical psychology, clinical neuropsychology, community psychology, counselling psychology, rehabilitation psychology, and paediatric psychology (Wahass, 2005). According to Lilienfeld et al. (2014), the discipline of psychology is concerned with understanding mental processes and behaviour of people throughout their lives, focusing on dimensions such as learning, motivation, experiences, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, personality, and social behaviour. Again, the field of psychology is also based on understanding the interactions between biological, behavioural, and social aspects, and how these factors impact on one another.

To Gibbons (2021); Holman et al. (2018) and Ricou et al. (2019), psychology professionals are equipped with significant knowledge that enables them to offer primary, secondary, and tertiary intervention and health care services. Firstly, the role of psychologists is to offer primary interventions that will prevent psychological problems before they occur. Secondly, psychologists are authorised to provide psychological assessments and diagnoses, psychological treatments, and rehabilitation to people who have psychological problems. Lastly, psychologists are responsible for limiting the impact of problems, and form part of a treatment team that provides advanced care to those with chronic illnesses.

Psychologist's duties include, but are not limited to, being trained to understand the influence of biological, behavioural, and social factors on health and illness, how individuals' behaviours and thoughts change and the impact of the change, and to understand how behaviour and cognitive processes result in malfunction (Wahass, 2005). Thus, psychologists should dedicate their time to understanding the impact of the family background (social dimension), such as how growing with a stepfather affects a child's

overall development. For instance, Karekla et al. (2021) perceived psychologists as proficient in managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on community members, health professionals, and policy. Furthermore, the American Psychological Association (2016) states that psychologists are skilled in the use of psychological, psychodiagnostics, and psychotherapeutic techniques to ethically diagnose, treat, and deal with maladaptive behaviours, as well as to change behaviours and lifestyles that perpetuate health issues. Thus, psychologists should use their acquired skills and techniques to intervene and conduct community awareness regarding the challenges young females face when raised by social fathers. This will be seen as a primary intervention in which young females will be aware that psychologists are available to them when they experience challenges regarding their stepfathers.

2.11 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS

Legislative frameworks are vital in governmental decision-making. According to Magnusson (2017:1), there is no stable definition of legislative framework, however, it refers “to legislation that sets out processes for government actions or executive deliberations or that creates structures, processes, constraints or other parameters to guide decision-making”. In support, Rasool (2016) states that legislative frameworks play a significant role in allowing citizens to exercise their rights. In other words, the existence of laws is necessary to allow young females to voice their injustices. In light of this, this section focuses on legislatives frameworks aimed at protecting young females against violation. It should be noted that the researcher will also perused the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2005) as violence does not always start at a young age, but may begin when the child is young and continue throughout their development.

- **The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996**

There are a variety of approaches adopted to alleviate the abuse and maltreatment suffered by children. According to Hanson (2014), South African models for child protection and welfare were drawn from the British and American ‘child-saving movement’. The rights of children should not be perceived only as the parents’ responsibility, but should be the responsibility of all adults in the community. In other

words, all community members, including social fathers, are obliged to respect children and protect them from violence and mistreatment. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (RSA, 1996) sets out a clear mandate of the rights of children to education, shelter, health, and freedom from abuse or maltreatment. Not only are the rights of children a concern in the South African constitution, but they are also the main principle in the children's statute (Bill of rights).

- **The Children's Act 38 of 2005**

To ensure that children's rights are protected, the South African Government introduced the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2005). Mahery et al. (2010) assert that the main objective of Children's Act is to implement the children's rights that the South African Constitution stipulates. These rights include among others the right to family care, parental care or appropriate alternative care, accessible social services, and protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation. This Act further stipulates the obligation of all to ensure the best interests of the child in every matter that involves the child. For instance, in cases where someone suspects or witnesses any form of abuse against a child, it is incumbent upon them to report it to concerned stakeholders such as police officials, social workers, or child welfare institutions.

Despite the stipulations of the Children's Act, children continue to be mistreated and violated. Much rights-based legislations have been introduced to protect children but there is a lack of resources to ensure the protection of these children (Richter & Dawes, 2008). Bower (2014) asserts that progress towards mitigating child oppression is inadequate and does not receive the required resources. Moreover, Bower maintains that although legislation is clear, patriarchy and traditional views still perpetuate and the abuse of children continues, especially for those children living in poor communities.

- **The Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998**

Domestic violence is highly controversial and emotive issue in South Africa and young females are particularly exposed and prone to this type abuse. Domestic violence can be either primary or secondary. Primary domestic violence occurs when pain is inflicted on

the victim in the domestic situation. Slabbert (2017) indicates that secondary domestic violence refers to malicious activity witnessed by a young person such that affects their mental health. Mazibuko and Umejisi (2015); and Smythe (2015) reported that every six hours a young person is raped or killed in South Africa. In terms of Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 (RSA, 1998), a person can be reported for any form of abuse, including stalking and breaking into a person's property without their consent. This Act further provides that victims of domestic violence can apply for protection orders against their perpetrators. In addition, Rasool (2016) postulates that individuals who lack information about the process of obtaining a protection order can use the criminal justice system services where they will be guided. However, this Act is sound on paper but poor in implementation. This is due to the score of gender-based violence (GBV) cases in South Africa. For instance, in the Free State province alone, 248 domestic violence cases were reported and 35 proceeded to prosecution (Stoltz, 2022).

2.12 CONCLUSION

Relationships that lead to the formation of stepfamilies are rapidly increasing, with unfavourable results on the lives of children. The above analysis of this domestic relationship demonstrates that although social fathers play a crucial role in the lives of young females, their presence is often associated with many adverse implications. Many studies show that young females experience various types of abuse ranging from emotional to physical, and they often struggle to cope with, among other challenges, academic pressure. These challenges can result in short and long-term effects as many young females growing up with social fathers have manifested undesirable behaviour changes accompanied by mental illness and emotional problems.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“Nothing has such power to broaden the mind as the ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under thy observation in life.”

- Marcus Aurelius

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Given the presented research problem (see Chapter 1), in this section, the researcher provides the methods which were suited to addressing the identified problem, and this section discusses the research methodology adopted in the study, focusing on the research type and approach, research design, population, sampling method and techniques, data collection method, data analysis, quality criteria, and ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM AND APPROACH

The study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm due to its efficacy in understanding the subjective meaning of an individual's experience/s. According to Pham (2018), the interpretative paradigm contends that reality and truth can be generated through understanding the meaning that people attach to their world views. Moreover, Ryan (2018) and McChesney and Aldridge (2019) state that interpretivists take into account the varieties of culture, situations, and time that contribute to the development of various social realities. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) and Chowdhury (2014) posit that interpretivism cannot be compared to the physical phenomena in the natural sciences, because human beings construct in-depth meaning through their senses. Hence, Rehman and Alharthi (2016) opined that interpretivism is contrary to the notion of positivism, which claims that knowledge is acquired through measured and verifiable facts. In other words, researchers using this paradigm cannot impose what they believe is the truth on their participants, but instead aim to understand how their participants perceive their surroundings.

The researcher opted for the interpretivist paradigm as it was aligned to the study design, which is phenomenological. Hiller (2016) states that the phenomenological design is one of the designs interpretivists use to understand that individuals are not merely the world inhabitants, but they become immersed with their contextual worlds. Thus, the researcher adopted the interpretivist paradigm because she was interested in gaining in-depth information on the worldviews of young females raised by social fathers at Driekop.

The researcher used a qualitative approach to undertake the study. Several authors are in agreement that the qualitative approach can be used by qualitative researchers to describe and understand phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Kumar, 2018; Lapan et al. 2012; Teherani et al., 2015). In other words, a qualitative approach is used by researchers who seek to gain answers to multifaceted questions through interaction with participants. Researchers utilise the qualitative approach to collect narrative data from participants to unpack, create verbal descriptions, and form meaning out of the attained data (de Vos, 2011). To Grosseohme (2014), a qualitative approach entails a systematic collection, organisation, and interpretation of data from participants. Gentles et al. (2015) posit that a qualitative approach involves an observation and interpretation of people's views of the world and their situations in their natural settings.

The researcher opted for the qualitative research approach because it is holistic in nature and researchers using this approach remain open-minded to retain objectivity and immerse themselves in the participants' described situations (Kumar, 2018). In support of this approach, Eyisi (2016) and Mohajan (2018) propose that qualitative researchers collect multidimensional data by reading literature, observing behaviour, and holding in-depth interviews, instead of merely relying on one data source. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to interact with participants by interviewing them and gaining insight and information from them regarding their personal experiences of growing up with a social father.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a phenomenological research design. According to de Vos (2011), phenomenology was developed by Alfred Schutz who sought to describe how individuals form meaning to their everyday experiences. Wilson (2015) claims that phenomenological research design was established to study human experiences. In other words, phenomenological research is significant for researchers that aim to describe how individuals perceive and understand the world and the situations in which they find themselves. Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015) opine that the use of phenomenological design is embedded in attaining qualitative data on the lived experiences from the experiencer and grants for an understanding of participants' subjective lived experiences. Moreover, Qutoshi (2018) adds that although there is no clear definition of the term 'phenomenology', it can be understood as a concept that seeks to describe issues as they manifest in reality.

Researchers conducting a phenomenological study rely on information provided by participants instead of using a prepared framework, and they strive for accuracy (de Vos, 2011). Morrell-Scott (2018) postulates that phenomenologists use a bracketing method during data collection to maintain objectivity. In other words, researchers who use phenomenology, perceive participants at a deeper level of understanding their situations without allowing their preconceptions to interfere with the process of data collection. Bracketing refers to a technique used by phenomenological researchers to ensure validity during data collection and analysis (Qutoshi, 2018). To employ this technique effectively, Morrell-Scott (2018) posits that researchers should present raw data to reveal its authenticity. Due to the overwhelming advantages possessed by the phenomenological design, the researcher saw fit to utilise the design as Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015) advice that phenomenological design is ideal for interrogating the lived experiences of the subjects under study. The use of the phenomenological design allowed the researcher to comprehend the experience of young females and it enabled her to understand the experience's effects and its meaning to the young females.

3.5 STUDY AREA

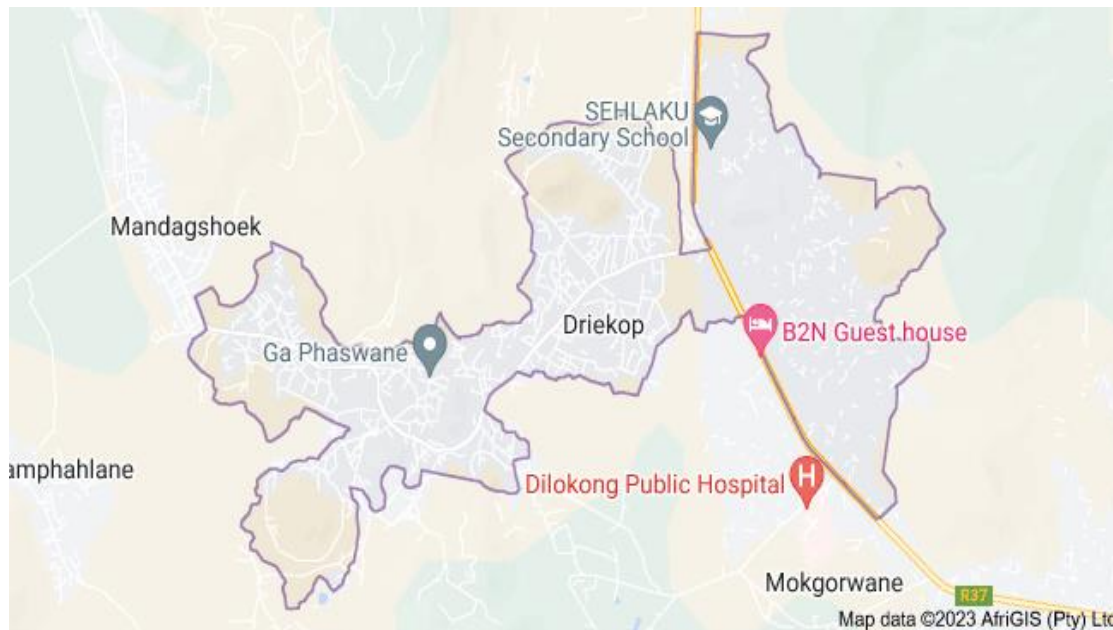


Figure 1: Study area

Driekop is a community located in the Feta-kgomo Tubatse Local Municipality of Sekhukhune District situated at an elevation of 976 metres above sea level. The community comprises five villages with an estimated population of 3487. From the estimated study population, it is reported that females are in majority at 50.4%, white males represent 49.6% of the population. According to Stats SA (2022), young females represent 4.5% of the population and males represent 4.4%. It is also stated that the majority of the households (25.7%) in Driekop community are headed by females. Lastly, 41.5% of the community members have completed secondary school and those 3.5% of the underdeveloped community have a higher education.

3.6 POPULATION

A study population refers to a group of objects or people that share similar characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic or marital status that a researcher is interested in studying (Asiamah, 2017). In other words, the study population includes individuals with common characteristics from which a sample was drawn. The population

of this study included young black females aged between 18- 24 years of age who are raised by their stepfathers and reside in the Driekop community.

3.7 SAMPLING

A sampling method refers to the process of choosing a few individuals to represent a population from which they were selected. Taherdoost (2016) proposes that sampling methods aid researchers in saving time and resources by selecting a small group that is representative of the larger group. This study used the purposive sampling technique, which falls under the non-probability sampling method. According to Etikan et al. (2016), purposive sampling is also known as judgement sampling, and it used in cases where the researcher deliberately selects participants based on the qualities that they possess. In this study, the researcher purposefully sampled young females because they possessed qualities that helped her to achieve the study's aim. In terms of the sampling size, Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that the minimum sample for qualitative research before reach saturation is 12 participants. However, in this study, the researcher reached the level of saturation at seven participants. Data saturation represents gathering information from consecutive participants to the point of completing the data set as indicated by data repetition (Saunders et al., 2018). In this study, data saturation started to emerge with Participant 6 and the researcher stopped interviewing other participants after interviewing Participant 7.

3.7.1 Inclusion criteria

In this study, the inclusion criteria were as follows:

- young black females raised by social fathers;
- young black females residing in Driekop, Limpopo province; and
- young black females aged 18-24

3.7.2 Exclusion criteria

In this study, the exclusion criteria were as follows:

- any young female not raised by a social father;
- any young female not residing in Driekop, Limpopo Province; and

- any young female below the age of 18 and above the age of 24.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection method refers to a systematic way of gathering relevant data to answer research questions using selected methods of investigation (Bilsborrow, 2016). Kumar (2018) states that the data collection is significant to research as researchers cannot finalise a research project without such data. The methods of data collection can be categorised into two types, namely, the primary data collection method and the secondary data collection method.

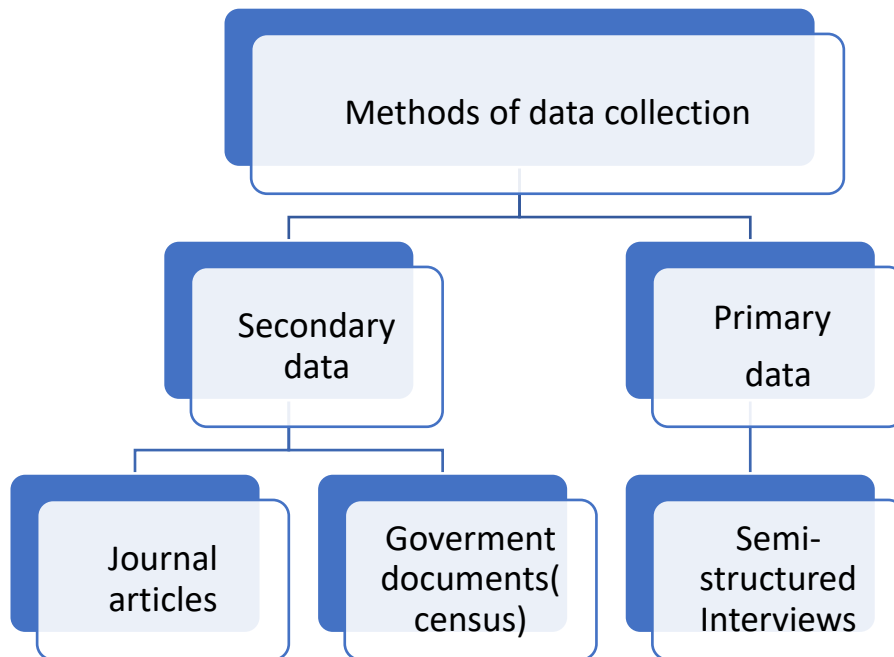


Figure 2: Methods of data collection

Source: Author

- Primary data collection

Primary methods of data collection include collecting data from participants through interviews and observation (Kumar, 2018). Primary data such as interviews are reliable, objective, and authentic data that is collected directly from participants (Riley, Lambert & Abo-Zaid, 2010). In this study, the researcher opted for face-to-face interviews to solicit reliable, objective, and authentic data from young black females raised by their social

fathers. To be flexible, the researcher used an interview guide. Nathan et al. (2019) describe face to face interviews forming part of semi-structured interviews in which the researcher uses verbal communication to obtain information about participants' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Additionally, De Jonckheere and Vaughn (2019) state that semi-structured interviews can be used by qualitative researchers who aim to unearth information about a certain phenomenon from participants and to confront sensitive or personal issues. The use of this method enabled the researcher to probe further and gain insightful information from the participants. The researcher interviewed each participant for not more than forty-five minutes to ensure that participant's concentration levels were optimal.

Prior the data collection, the researcher recruited the participants from the village by means of calling for the participants using social media (see the attached advert: Annexure G). The information included on the advert captured the aim of the study, benefits, targeted population, benefits and contact details of the researchers. The participants who were interested in the study contacted the researcher in an attempt to find out more about the study. The researcher explained the study to the participants the study and provided them with the informed consent. The participants were given 72 hours to decide if they want to participate in the study or not. After the 72 hours, the researcher went to collect the signed informed consent and also answered questions which some participants had regarding the informed consent.

- Secondary data collection

Secondary methods of data collection include the collection of data from existing literature. According to Martins, da Cunha, and Serra (2018:2), "secondary data may include data that has been previously gathered and is under consideration to be reused for new questions, for which the data gathered was not originally intended". In other words, secondary data is data that is not collected by the author; as an alternative, it is obtained from secondary sources such as journal articles, books, and internet websites. In this study, secondary data was used to corroborate the new findings, and/or to dispute the existing literature. The researcher collected data from peer-reviewed published

articles from various journals and government documents. These articles were sought from reliable databases such as Google scholar, Sabinet, Jstor, South African National ETD portal, and EBSCOHost.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

In a qualitative study, data analysis involves a process of transforming collected data into findings, by organising it into important themes or patterns (de Vos et al. 2011). Kumar (2018) emphasises that data analysis aids researchers to interpret, structure, and create meaning out of the collected data. Moreover, Khaldi (2017) indicates that qualitative researchers use inductive reasoning and they start with specific research questions and make general conclusions from their findings. Thus, it was of paramount importance for the researcher to use a qualitative approach that facilitated precise thematic categorisation of the collected participant data. It is in this context that the researcher analysed data using inductive thematic analyses.

According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), inductive thematic analysis is a data analysis method employed in qualitative studies to bring order to and find meaning in the collected data. Clarke and Braun (2006) claim that researchers who use an inductive method of analysis are not influenced by pre-existing data. In support of this assertion, Creswell (2014) states that these researchers rely mainly on the data collected from the field before drawing conclusions. In this study, the researcher relied on data collected from interviews (not theory) to conclude the study. Again, the inductive thematic analysis method enabled the researcher to organise themes and achieve an understanding by interpreting participants' recounts of their lived experiences. The researcher was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2014) six steps of data analysis:

- Step 1: Familiarisation with data

Familiarisation with data is the first step that entails a deep understanding of data achieved by reading textual data, listening to audio recordings, and watching videos. Following the process of data collection, the researcher immersed herself with data that was collected from the face-to-face interviews. By so doing, the researcher read and re-

read interview transcripts and listened to audio recordings to gain a clear understanding of the data. Byrne (2022) proposes that understanding the data before proceeding to the next stage helps the researcher to identify information that may be relevant to research questions. For that reason, the researcher reverted back to participants to verify her interpretations of their statements to eliminate misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Communicating with participants again enabled the researcher to be intimately familiar with the data. Subsequently, the researcher commenced with data transcription. Although the transcription of data is time-consuming and monotonous, the researcher-maintained focus to ensure objectivity and to equally consider every angle of the dataset. Once the researcher completed the first step, she proceeded to the second stage, namely data-coding.

- Step 2: Generating codes

This step is marked by generating codes to order the collected data. According to Nowell et al. (2017), this phase can commence when a researcher is completely familiar with collected data and has an idea of what the data is about and has seen what interests them. As such, the researcher categorised the collected data into consistent categories guided by the researched phenomenon. The researcher grouped similarities in data and arranged them systematically, while simultaneously reducing the unsolicited data. In other words, the researcher progressed from unstructured data to achieving a firm notion of the data contents. Moreover, the researcher utilised various colours to highlight the important areas, as data coding was done manually. Following the development of initial codes and a list of different codes across the data set, the researcher moved to the next phase of generating themes.

- Step 3: Identifying themes

This step follows code creation and is the stage during which the researcher sorts and channels the coded data into themes. DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) underscored that a theme is a concept used by researchers to describe consistency and regularity of data during data analysis in qualitative research. In the same vein, Nowell et al. (2017:8) define a theme as “an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience

and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole”. Accordingly, the researcher captured critical points of data that were related to the research questions and used them to create themes (see Chapter 4, Table 1).

- Step 4: Reviewing themes

This step involves reviewing emerging themes to verify whether they align with the whole data set. In this study, the researcher reviewed the developed themes against the codes to establish if the data arranged into codes worked in relation to the themes. In addition, the researcher re-visited themes that lacked coherence and not were not supported with enough data to combine and/or form new themes. This is supported by Braun and Clarke (2013) who reiterate that differences observed in established themes should be easily recognised, and all themes must be comprehensible and eloquent. Nowell et al. (2017) claim that the fourth step allows the researcher to add themes that were not covered by an existing code, or to delete those that repeat themselves. In reviewing the themes, the researcher ensured that they addressed the study objectives (see Table 1 in Chapter 4 for the formed themes).

- Step 5: Defining themes

This step involves defining and naming themes. In other words, the researcher should identify and capture the meaning of each theme that emerges from the collected data. In this study, the researcher determined unique and non-overlapping themes that addressed the research questions and guaranteed that the themes were supported by extracts from the collected data. Furthermore, the researcher produced concise theme names and operational definitions that provided a summary of the study. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), developed themes should be brief and provide the reader with a sense of what the theme is about. In Chapter 4, the researcher explains each theme in the introductory sentence.

- Step 6: Report Writing

This is the final step of data analysis in which the researcher writes and produces a report. At this stage, the researcher has completed the data analysis process and produced an interpretable piece of writing in the form of a dissertation. The report writing is presented in Chapter 4, where the researcher presents the theme, including the definitions, interpretations of the findings, and a discussion of findings guided by the theoretical framework that guides the study.

3.10 QUALITY CRITERIA

In a qualitative study, to ensure that there is quality in the researcher's work, the researcher must ensure that the study has an element of trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is divided into four aspects: credibility; dependability; transferability; and conformability.

- **Credibility**

The concept of credibility is closely linked to internal validity, it is concerned with the certainty or truthfulness of research findings (de Vos et al., 2011). In other words, the credibility of a study determines whether the researcher captured data correctly from participants, and whether the research findings represent the participants' original views. In this study, the researcher ensured credibility by having sufficient engagement with participants and spending enough time with them to understand their settings or contexts. This assisted the researcher to establish trust and avoid miscommunication between her and her participants. Additionally, the researcher used both English and the participant's mother tongue to ascertain the participants' levels of understanding. Furthermore, the researcher listened to the recordings and reviewed the collected data multiple times to avoid incorrect interpretation and to eliminate bias. The developed codes were co-coded by another qualitative researcher, to ensure that the developed themes were relevant.

- **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the extent to which findings of a research are consistent and reliable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability suggests that when research is dependable, other researchers can repeat the same interviews with the same participants

in the same setting. This element of research allows other researchers to assess and criticise the research findings of a particular study. To ensure this study's dependability, the researcher used a combination of field notes and audio recordings to ensure that she did not lose any information during the presentation of her findings. The researcher used consistent research methodology throughout the stages of data collection and through systematic analysis. Again, the researcher used a consistent introduction that helped to calm and reassure participants who thought their data might be used against them at a later stage. To further calm the participants, the researcher stated the study aim and objectives to the participants.

- Transferability

Transferability is an element of qualitative research in which researchers ensure that their research findings can apply in other research settings, with other participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Patias & Hohendorff, 2019). It is the readers' responsibility to judge the transferability of research findings since the researcher is not familiar with the readers' contexts. In this study, the researcher ensured transferability through a rich description of research details, such as research context, sample size, and interview procedure.

- Conformability

Conformability, also known as neutrality, is an element of qualitative research that allows other researchers to confirm the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2019). Researchers can use this element to ensure that the author did not fabricate data. In this study, the researcher ensured conformability by appointing a third person to transcribe the data. Additionally, the researcher ensured that the appointed person signed a confidentiality agreement to protect participants and the obtained data. Moreover, the researcher clearly stated her reasons for choosing the used methodology and theory to enable other researchers to comprehend the logic behind "how" and "why" choices were made in the study. The researcher was also aware of her own beliefs and assumptions and therefore bracketed her thoughts to enhance objectivity.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.11.1 Permission to conduct the study

The researcher sought ethical clearance from the University of Limpopo, Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) before conducting the study. The TREC granted permission to conduct the study on 28 February 2023 with the assigned project number TREC/60/2023: PG (see Appendix D). Again, the researcher approached the Ndonga (traditional council) in Driekop who granted her permission to conduct the study on 15 March 2023 (see Appendix E).

3.11.2 Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy

In compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act No.4 of 2013, information provided by participants was kept confidential and no one was addressed by their legal name during the discussion phase (Staunton & De Stadler, 2019). The researcher used pseudonyms such as Participant 1 to refer to those who participated in the study. The collected data was stored in a password-encrypted Google Drive.

3.11.3 Informed consent, respect, and privacy

Prior to the research study commencing, the researcher is responsible for educating research participants about reasons for conducting the research, and the aim and objectives of the study (Christensen et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher introduced herself to the participants and briefed them about the nature and purpose of the research. The researcher notified the prospective participants that participating in the research was entirely voluntary and they were allowed to withdraw at any stage without any penalty. To show respect to participants, the researcher read the consent forms in either Northern Sotho or English, depending on their choice, thereby ensuring understanding of the content. Furthermore, participants who agreed to participate in the study verbally consent to being interviewed.

3.11.4 Avoidance of harm

The researcher avoided bringing physical and emotional harm to participants by notifying them that they were not forced to participate in the study. Again, the researcher anticipated that this study might cause the participants some emotional discomfort or distress and therefore informed the participants that they should notify the researcher in case of feeling uncomfortable when answering certain questions, and advised them that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Participants who experienced emotional distress were referred to a social worker at the Dilokong Hospital.

3.12 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the research methods that were adopted in the study. The researcher opted to take a qualitative approach and utilised a phenomenological research design to gain insight into the lived experiences of young females residing in the Driekop community. Again, the target population from which the sample was extracted was clearly outlined, and participants were sampled using the purposive sampling technique. Furthermore, data was collected using face to face interviews and analysed using the inductive thematic analysis method. The methods used in the study were vital as they allowed the researcher to write the next chapter. In conclusion, the subsequent chapter will focus on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

“Any man can help make a child, but it takes a special man to help raise a child.”

- Tony Gaskins

4.1 INTROUCTION

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of collected data from young females raised by their social fathers. Data was collected through face to face interviews to gain insight into the lived experiences of young females growing up with a social father and the data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps. Themes emerging in the study emanate from the study objectives and/or research questions, and are discussed in relation to the Attachment Theory. The researcher used pseudonyms to refer to participants and protect their identity and the confidential information they shared. The table below presents the themes and subthemes that emerged in the study:

4.2 EMERGING THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

As pointed out in the research methodology chapter (see Chapter 3), the researcher applied Braun and Clarke's (2013) six steps to develop the themes. To start with, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by assessing and reading the interview transcripts multiple times (four times). After familiarising herself with the data, the researcher transformed the collected data into consistent categories guided by the study objectives (see Chapter 1). She looked at similarities in the data and arranged them systematically while simultaneously removing the unsolicited data. Moreover, the researcher utilised various colours to highlight the important information from the transcripts to facilitate initial coding. Following the development of initial codes and a list of different codes across the data set, the researcher moved to the next phase of generating themes. She identified the themes by capturing critical points of data that were related to the research objectives, and used them to create themes. After creating themes and subthemes (see Table 1), the researcher reviewed those themes and subthemes to ensure that they were aligned with the study objectives. After ensuring that the themes

were relevant, the researcher tabulated those themes and subthemes (see Table 1) and only defined them when presenting findings (see sections 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6).

Themes	Subthemes
PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF GROWING UP WITH A SOCIAL FATHER	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feeling of worthlessness 2. Sense of loneliness 3. Lacking a sense of belonging 4. Inability to open up 5. Preoccupied with fear of abuse
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF BEING RAISED BY SOCIAL FATHERS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discrimination amongst siblings 2. Lack of relationship with biological father 3. Lack of social support from the young female's mother 4. Household tension 5. Strained relationship with extended stepfamily
THE INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIAL FATHERS IN THE LIFE OF YOUNG FEMALES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing academic support 2. Lack of financial support
COPING MECHANISM USED BY YOUNG FEMALES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prayer 2. Support from significant other 3. Substance use

Table 1: Emerged themes and subthemes

4.3 THEME 1: PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF GROWING UP WITH A SOCIAL FATHER

Psychological challenges, used interchangeably with psychologically abnormal behaviour, fundamentally form part of every person's life. Seefeldt (2014) indicates that there has been no universal definition of psychological challenges because scholars

believe that psychologically abnormal behaviour can best be described dimensionally. This suggests that psychologically abnormal behaviour is defined differently according to the context in which it occurs or in individuals who are affected. In addition, Heekin and Polivka (2015) and Malla et al. (2015) are all in agreement that psychological challenges can emanate from various environments such as in the workplace, from natural disasters, in divorce/separation, according to cultural and social variables, and from health issues that one interrelates with on a daily basis. For instance, people can experience mental distress, maladjustment, personal problems, and behavioural and emotional disturbances which can affect their daily functioning. However, in this context, the psychological challenges come as a result of their social environment, which is the relationship between social fathers and young females. In discussing this theme, the following subthemes emerged during coding: feelings of worthlessness; a sense of loneliness; lacking a sense of belonging; an inability to open up; and a preoccupation with being abused.

4.3.1 Feelings of worthlessness

The feeling of worthlessness is keenly related to negative feelings about one's self. Harrison et al. (2022) and Jeon et al. (2014) posit that feelings of worthlessness are considered primary feelings of major depressive disorder and individuals with such feelings exhibit lack of interest and pleasure. In addition, feelings of worthlessness are strongly associated with feelings of hopelessness and self-blame. In other words, people who feel worthless blame themselves and lack hope in their lives. Evidently, in this study, some of the participants blamed themselves and one participant stated the following:

"I can say growing up with a stepfather is very difficult because sometimes you feel as if you are not good enough, you are not his child and what he does for you is not enough". (Participant 1)

The most dangerous part about feeling worthless is that some individuals might commit suicide. Thus, Wakefield and Schmitz (2016) indicate that feelings of worthlessness are closely related to suicide attempts, and it is clinically sensible to consider worthlessness as a source of suicidal tendencies. Another participant stated:

“It is not as exciting as one would think it is. There are many red flags or challenges that one goes through. It can be from extended family or the father. It is very tough, from what I have experienced, and I am surprised that I am still alive now”.
(Participant 4)

From the above findings, it is reasonable to state that growing up with a social father is challenging but these challenges do not emanate only from the social father, but also his family members. As a result, young females develop feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, and develop the idea that they are not good enough for their social fathers. This confirms DeLongis and Zwicker (2017) and Perales et al.'s (2017) findings, which established that children who grow up in non-traditional families experience internalising disorders, such as depression and emotional difficulties. Similarly, Tau (2020) states that young adults who lacked a father's affection and affirmation from a young age grow up lacking trust and feel unwanted and unworthy of love. The above findings are in line with the study's theory, namely, proponent four (disorganised attachment style), which posits that individuals with a disorganised style long for affection and grow up perceiving their parents as threats rather than support systems.

4.3.2 Sense of loneliness

The feeling of loneliness knows no boundaries and affects individuals regardless of their gender, age, or socio-demographic characteristics. Yanguas et al. (2018) claim that loneliness is a feeling that originates from weakness and self-pity, and that lonely individuals eventually resolve these feelings because they are internal rather than physical. Holmqvist and Östlund (2019) confirm this assertion, stating that loneliness is a subjective feeling experienced by individuals who feel separated or disconnected to other individuals. Loneliness can manifest in two ways, namely as emotional loneliness or social loneliness. These two categories of loneliness differ in that emotional loneliness results from a psychological response to social relationships that an individual desires to have, and social loneliness refers to an absence of social networks to which an individual can feel attached to (Holmqvist & Östlund, 2019). Furthermore, Stocker et al. (2020) postulate that loneliness is a common feeling as people mature and is closely related to

physical health issues and psychological challenges. The study participants reported feeling alone and empty due to growing up without their biological fathers. The following are some of the views which they shared:

“I felt a gap that I need to know my biological father. However, when I found him I regretted looking for him, because he does not do anything for me and I can count how many times I have seen him”. (Participant 1)

Although social fathers are present in the lives of the young females, it is clear that their presence does not fulfil the parental role as young females still long for their biological father’s love. Aslam et al. (2015) found that children in stepfamilies lack warmth from their stepparents. Unlike in first time families where parents have time to bond before having children, stepparents in stepfamilies are caught between building their relationship and simultaneously taking care of the children (Papernow, 2018b). For that reason, the needs of children are often ignored, leaving them feeling rejected, lonely, and invisible. The researcher reasonably believes that young females raised by social fathers feel less prioritised by their parents, and believe that their biological father would put them first. It was evident in this study that some young females longed for the love of their biological fathers. This is supported by the following statement:

“I still had a gap that would have been filled by my biological father because he had another child”. (Participant 5)

4.3.3 Lacking a sense of belonging

Human beings generally desire to belong and connect with others. A sense of belonging is defined as a feeling of being welcomed, loved, and valued without changing one’s identity to fit in (Pesonen, 2016; Wilczynska et al., 2015). Riley (2019) states that the concept of belonging is moulded by culture, history, circumstances, geographical location, as well as interpersonal relations. In this study, young females expressed that they lacked a sense of belonging:

“My stepfather made me feel that I am not his child by buying things for his young child when he comes back from town and I would feel left out. In my mind, I would

console myself by telling myself that it's fine since he is not my biological father". (Participant 1)

Another participant echoed:

"He and my mother had another child so I could feel that I am not really a part of this family, and sometimes they will take me to my grandmother's place which made me feel excluded". (Participant 5)

The aforementioned findings clearly show that it is challenging for stepchildren to develop a sense of belonging in stepfamilies, particularly when their parents have other children. King et al. (2015) adds that family belonging is important to avoid the development of adverse effects like emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, violence, early sexual experiences, negative academic behaviours, and substance abuse in children. Behere et al. (2017) suggest that children growing up in intact families are less likely to experience trauma as opposed to children living in disrupted family structures. King et al. (2015) affirms that the presence of two biological parents (rather than the presence of a step-parent) in a family strengthens a child's sense of belonging. The researcher concluded that perceived availability of biological parents initiates connectivity and relatedness in children as per the secure attachment tenet of the Attachment Theory. These children grow with a sense of security regarding their social position. Securely attached children are known to believe that they are knowledgeable, deserve to be respected, and they perceive other individuals as kind, helpful, and supportive (Vandell & Rook, 2011). Therefore, the absence of biological parents during the early stages of these young females negatively affected their interaction with their social fathers, leading to relational problems. In this study, other participants also expressed that they have unstable relationships with their social fathers:

"I have an on and off relationship with my stepfather because there are days where we disagree on things; that takes me back to thinking that he is not my biological father". (Participant 2)

A sense of belonging is closely associated with participation, citizenship, and entitlement. In order to belong to a certain group or community, individuals actively interact with group members or have citizenship of the place they are in. According to King et al. (2015), children growing up in stepfamilies automatically seek to belong in the larger family group, and if the family environment has a negative atmosphere, children will suffer hostile consequences. In this study, some participants admitted to having inconsistent relationships with their social fathers.

4.3.4 Inability to open up

Parental remarriage results in sometimes overwhelming surroundings for children. Metts et al. (2013) consider the transition from divorce to remarriage disturbing for children's emotional development as they must socialise and form new relationships with strangers that have now become family. Often, the process of socialising and negotiating new relationships and roles creates confusion in stepchildren, causing them to suppress their emotions. In this study, it became evident that some young females were unable to talk to their mothers once they entered into a new relationship with their social fathers.

“When you live with a stepfather, it is difficult to talk to them about many things. For instance, I was once sexually harassed by my 50 year old uncle who stayed next door, and I could not talk to my mother and social father about the harassment”. (Participant 1)

The findings in the study corroborate Metts et al. (2013) findings which established that children in stepfamilies suffer from communication issues due to the children's inability to cognitively and emotionally process parental remarriage. Similarly, Cayatoc et al. (2020) aver that though children differ in the way in which they process the formation of new families, many children believe that stepparents should bear the responsibility of initiating conversations and being approachable to children. Effective communication such as daily conversations within stepfamilies, enhances family bonds and shapes the way stepfamilies relate and behave towards each another (Hicks, 2014). For this reason, the incapacity of social fathers and young females to communicate might impair relational bonds and lead to distorted family setting. This is in line with Attachment Theory which

insists that the quality of a relationship is formed by emotional availability and engagement (Kim et al., 2014). In other words, poor communication between young females and social fathers may result in an insecure attachment style in young females. Due to the emotional absence of social fathers, young females may develop fear of rejection and anti-social behaviour, which is likely to affect their ability to form relationships later on, and lead to aggressive behaviours. Again, when these young females suppress their emotions, they might develop mental health issues such as depression, bipolar, and anxiety disorders. This is supported by Kodero and Kimani (2021) who postulate that children of separated biological parents tend to experience externalising disorders such as aggressive and delinquent behaviour, and internalising disorders such as depression and emotional distress.

While the above indicates that young females are unable to open up to their parents when they experience harassment, some of the young females also indicated that their social fathers did not understand the developmental stages of their stepchildren. In this study, it was evident that social fathers were angry when the young females arrived home late.

“During my years of dating, my stepfather did not want to understand the stage I was in. He would make everything a big deal and get angry, when I come home one minute late”. (Participant 2)

Hicks (2014) proposes that there should be division of responsibilities in families to eliminate the issue of role ambiguity. For Pace et al. (2015), females prefer to be disciplined by their biological mothers. Hence, having clear family roles will aid in the family understanding their individual roles and ensure that children know exactly which parent is responsible in the house for curfews and discipline.

4.3.5 Preoccupation with fear of abuse

The concept of abuse refers to actions or behaviours that are intended to cause harm, intimidate, or hurt an individual (Fayaz, 2019). These behaviours can manifest as physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. As stated earlier, Nyarko et al. (2014) indicate that abuse can affect any person, regardless of their age, family background, financial

status, or gender, and yields adverse consequences. This means that young females living in stepfamilies are not immune to abuse. This is supported by Debowska et al. (2020) who claim that young people affected by abuse are likely to experience psychological issues such as antisocial behaviour, aggression, violence, depression, and self-destructive behaviour. Again, this group of individuals often underachieve at school. In this study, participants explained that they live in fear of abuse from their social fathers. One participant said:

“... most cases I lock my door and [am] fearful to open it when I am left with my step father... I do that so that he does not get any ideas and try to abuse me when my mom is not around”. (Participant 4)

Debowska et al. (2020) state that many people always perceive stepparents, as opposed to biological parents, as being abusive to their stepchildren. On the other hand, Nobes et al. (2022) posits that abuse behaviours in stepparents, particularly stepfathers, typically results from the abuse that they suffered from their fathers as children. It can be deduced that young females in stepfamilies experience intergenerational violence created through the insecure or disorganised attachment issues of their social fathers. It should be noted that one tenet of the Attachment Theory, namely disorganised attachment, maintains that children growing up in a disorganised environment will develop anxiety and avoidant attachment styles (White, Gibson & Wastell, 2019). In essence, the study participants may experience issues such as an inability to form relationships, leading to social isolation, ineffective stress management, inability to seek assistance, and aggressive behaviour.

While Participant 4 feared for her own livelihood, Participant 1 was actually fearing what might become of her own child should she break up with her baby's father. The participant experienced abuse from her social father and does not want the cycle to be continued with her own child if she broke up with her current partner.

“I am scared that breaking up with my baby daddy will put my daughter in a situation similar to mine, and I do not want her to experience the absence of a father like I did”. (Participant 1)

The aforementioned findings also indicate that some of the young females might remain in abusive relationships simply to ensure that their own children do not endure similar challenges they endured when they were young. This supports findings by Choudhury et al. (2020) who highlighted that mothers who remarry are often concerned about the wellbeing of their children in the presence of their stepfathers. These remarried mothers maintained that stepfathers get overly aggressive when reprimanded for abusing their stepchildren verbally and physically. It is therefore reasonable that a mother would fear putting their children's lives at risk by breaking up with the child's biological father to stay with a new partner.

4.4 THEME 2: SOCIOCULTURAL CHALLENGES OF BEING RAISED BY A SOCIAL FATHER

A society and culture significantly influences a child's development. Baskey (2020) refers to socio-cultural factors such as the family, a person's role in the community, religion, values, attitudes, and community as shaping one's thinking, actions, and emotions. In essence, socio-cultural elements safeguard an individual's growth and determines how they behave and respond to certain situations. This section focuses on the socio-cultural themes that emerged from the interviews with the study participants. These sub-themes include discrimination amongst siblings, lack of relationship with a biological father, lack of social support from the young female's mother, household mood subsequent to the social father's presence, and strained relationships with extended family members.

4.4.1 Discrimination amongst siblings

Regardless of enormous strategies to end discrimination, discrimination amongst siblings remains a challenge in young female's lives. However, sibling relationships are important for the psychosocial development of individuals, and is characterised by warmth and conflict (Buist & Vermande, 2014; Dirks et al., 2015). This means that normal interaction between siblings involves warmth, which is seen in the level of closeness and companionship as well as the conflict, which includes arguments and antagonism between siblings. Additionally, Mostafa, Gambaro, and Joshi (2018) found that sibling

relationships in stepfamilies can serve as a source of support amid the environmental stressors or facilitate maladjustment problems in stepchildren, leading to feelings of displacement in older stepchildren. This is because stepfamilies are prone to many stressors causing parental unresponsiveness or poor parenting practices, including discrimination amongst siblings. With that said, the study participants describe how parental discrimination made them feel and react. One participant said:

“My parents would buy her clothes every month, unlike me, because I only got clothes during winter and summer. That is why I would sometimes doubt their love for me”. (Participant 1)

Another participant expressed that due to the discrimination, sibling rivalry resulted:

“The relationship with my stepfather created hatred between us as siblings”. (Participant 3)

Unequal treatment amongst siblings can lead to both short- and long-term consequences. According to the participants' responses, it is evident that sibling discrimination may instill hatred in siblings, leading to conflict and causing health and behavioural problems. This suggests that young females in this study are at a risk of developing mood disorders and acting aggressively towards others. This was supported by Tucker and Finkelhor (2015) who found that rivalry amongst siblings usually lead to both internalising and externalising behavioural issues. Equally, Mostafa et al. (2018) emphasise that young people who stay with stepsiblings perform poorly at school, experience depression, develop school-related behavioural problems, and engage in criminal behaviours as opposed to those children living with full siblings. Although the study findings indicate that parents happen to treat siblings differently, Graham's (2010) research reveals that some stepfathers are more involved and their stepchildren refer to them as their fathers, especially if the stepfather has new children in the relationship. This means that when parents are equally available to their children, children are less likely to experience conflict, unlike when parents are unavailable to them. It is important to note that these young females are still in a stage of identity development, which requires the involvement of a parent to succeed. Therefore, the unavailability of parents to offer support and guidance to siblings may lead the sibling

to develop an insecure attachment style. Insecurely attached individuals are said to develop insecurities, dependencies, and seek approval from their intimate relationships as adults. In this case, young females may also become insecurely attached, and struggle to make their own decisions. These young females may also feel like they are not good enough for their partners, especially if their partners do not validate their actions from time to time.

4.4.2 Lack of relationship with biological father

The number of absent fathers is skyrocketing due to death and divorce rates. The phenomenon of absent father is used interchangeably with fatherlessness which refers to the absenteeism of biological fathers in their children's lives due to reasons such as death or divorce (Tau, 2020). Magqamfana and Bazana (2020) posit that the absence of a biological father is detrimental to the child's wellbeing and development due to their inability to perform parental roles such as offering social and emotional support to the child. Webster et al. (2014) revealed that girls growing up in the absence of their fathers often engage in sexual activities at a young age, and are not selective when choosing partners. In this study, it emerged that young females do not have a relationship with their biological fathers due to cultural factors. One of the participants stated:

"I had no relationship with my biological father. I was told he failed to pay for damages when I was young, and in my culture, without paying for damages you do not have access to your children... I desired to be welcomed by him and that we would have a good relationship and finally experience the father love".
(Participant 1)

Another participant said:

"I do not have a relationship with my biological father... I asked my grandmother about him and she told me, but I never had a relationship with him". (Participant 2)

Another participant echoed:

“I knew that guy, but black families will always try everything possible to stop you from having a relationship with your father as long he has not paid damages, especially if he is no longer with your mother.” [Participant 4]

According to Dabula (2018) and Makusha and Richer (2016) biological fathers have to pay a fee, mostly known as damages, in order to have a relationship with their children. However, failure to comply with cultural practices, results in a parent being denied access to the child. It goes without saying that in most cases the maternal family prioritises the money for damages over a father-child relationship, hence many children lack a relationship with their biological fathers, despite their fathers wanting to have relationship with their children. The above practice contradicts the legislation, which gives unmarried fathers the right to have to care for their children (RSA, 2005). It can be deduced that fathers who are denied access to their children will be unable to form attachment bonds with their daughters. Due to this lack of attachment, young females will be unlikely to maintain intimate relationships with their partners or they will move from one partner to the other in an attempt to fill the void left by their absent biological fathers. Again, these young females may develop trust issues or insecurities that people are out to hurt them, just like their fathers did. This is in line with Attachment Theory, which claims that children who do not establish a secure attachment in their childhood phase will develop insecure attachment that will manifest in unhealthy relationships when they are adults (Casterter, 2020; Joeng et al., 2017). Moreover, young females that are continually rejected by their fathers may also develop avoidant attachment, which predisposes them avoiding all romantic relationships.

However, even though other participants indicated that they do not have a relationship with their biological fathers, one of the participants stated that she is unable to strike a balance in her relationships with her biological father and her social father.

“I feel like I am stuck between cross-roads. My biological father checks with me if we can talk or meet, because my stepfather feels like he is losing me to him. I am not sure if it is the right thing to do but I keep things from my stepfather to protect his heart. It is just complicated”. (Participant 3)

Due to the separation of biological parents, Klaus et al. (2012) and Magqamfana and Bazana (2020) posit that children are likely to be raised by four parents, that is, a binuclear family, in which the parent-child relationship quality depends on the relationship that the child has with the other parents. For example, the relationship between a child and their biological father may depend on whether or not the stepfather approves of it. In African cultures, it is believed that a man who wishes to marry a woman with kids should also marry the children (Khunwane, 2019), and that happens even with young females. Hence, many stepfathers believe that they have full control over their stepchildren, and dismiss the relationship between children and their biological fathers, while other stepfathers require that their stepchildren request their permission before having a relationship with their biological fathers. In terms of these restrictions, the young females struggle to maintain a relationship with their biological fathers.

4.4.3 Lack of social support from the young female's mother

Maternal social and emotional support is important for the well-being of young females. Majeed (2016) emphasises that social support is one of the important aspects of an individual's growth and development, as it enhances their mental and physical strength. It can be deduced that a mother's love, warmth, and care would enable the young females in this study to adjust to their new domestic situation, such as mothers facilitating the introduction of their new partners to their children. Equally, De Figueiredo and Dias (2012) and Adjiwanou et al. (2021) state that a parents play an important role in socialising their children and introducing them to appropriate ways of conducting themselves. Therefore, when parents offer social support to their children they are likely to enhance a positive mindset and growth in them. For instance, young females are likely to develop a positive mindset towards their social fathers if their mothers keep reassuring them that their social fathers will not replace them. Unfortunately, in this study, young females expressed that they did not receive support from their parents, expressing this in the following statement:

"I do not have anyone to talk to because my mom is judgmental. Even when I spoke to my mother about being sexually harassed by my uncle, she told me that if he sexually harasses again they will take action against him". (Participant 1)

Meanwhile this participant is unable to talk when she is in trouble due to the fear of being judged by her mother. Another participant felt that her mother prioritises her new partner above her child's needs. This typically occurs because mothers in stepfamilies find themselves having to choose between their children and their new relationship. Jensen et al. (2018) posit that transitioning into a stepfamily often triggers stressors, such as a change in parent-child relationships, conflict between parents, and contradictions in cultural activities and expectations. Hence, the attention that children were used to before parental remarriage, becomes divided between the children and the new partner. One participant stated:

“My mother could not respond when I fought with my stepfather. I felt she is caught in between and must choose between me and my stepfather. Sometimes I felt like she should do more, and felt like she does not want to compromise her relationship”. (Participant 2)

Another participant said:

“My mother always brush[es] off what is happening, her support is not enough because she always sides with her husband. I learned to be independent and rather I tell a stranger my problems than her” (Participant 4)

The above findings demonstrate the lack of support mothers extend to the young females especially when a social father is part of their lives. This may be because mothers in stepfamilies find themselves having to choose between their children and their new relationship. Jensen et al. (2018) claim that transitioning into a stepfamily often triggers stressors such as a change in parent-child relationships, conflict between parents, and contradictions in cultural activities and expectations. Hence, the attention that children were used to prior to parental remarriage is split between their children and the new partner. Aslam et al. (2015) state that the parents' attention shifts to new spouses in remarriage, leading to neglect of their children needs. In light of this, mothers of young females may find themselves entertaining their new partners at the expense of their

children. Due to the lack of attention from mothers, these young females may feel left out and become withdrawn. As a result, these young females are susceptible to mental illness such as depression (Garipey et al., 2016). In terms of the study's theory, those young females who receive little or inconsistent response from their parents develop anxious attachment, which may affect their participation in romantic relationships later in life (Jones, 2015). For example, as they grow up, the young females may find it difficult to trust their romantic partners, and may experience insecurity and anxiety when believing that their partners are cheating on them.

4.4.4 Household tension

The adolescent stage is marked by disorientation or experimentation (Agarwal et al. 2020). For example, adolescents are likely to try new things such as sexual activities, substance use, and physical appearance experimentation. Hence, the presence of a new family member, in this case, a stepfather, might generate some complications for their stepchild when he is unaware of the role that these young females should play. Makofane and Mogoane (2012) opine that adolescents are affected by family disruptions, and may find it difficult to adapt to changes, because they are mentally mature enough to understand situations around them. In addition, DeLongis and Zwicker (2017) confirm that in comparison to biological families, stepfamilies are likely to report greater tensions and less closeness in the home. As a result of the tension, parents in stepfamilies may argue or fight more often, exposing children to an adverse family environment. In this study, young females experienced tension in the house as they were not given time to adapt to new living arrangements. The participants shared that:

“I found living with my stepfather very awkward because I was a bit old to understand what was happening. I didn't know him well, and it was during the years that I started to date. Most of the time, I did not know what to say to him”.
(Participant 2)

In support, another participant said:

“It was tense in the house most of the time. My stepfather used to complain a lot about me and my mother would think I am being unreasonable”. (Participant 3)

The above findings underpin that the introduction of a social father affects the daily lives of young females, especially if the introduction was not gradually announced. To gradually announce the new living arrangements, Cayatoc et al. (2020) suggest that biological parents should follow a progressively slow process when introducing stepparents, to allow stepchildren to adjust and accept their new stepparents. In this study, it emerged that young females were not gradually introduced to the change in their environments.

4.4.5 Strained relationship with extended stepfamily

Cultural differences play a role in the construction of stepfamilies. Participants in the study declared that their step relatives did not accept them because their cultural beliefs opposed the idea of having children out of wedlock. Again, these participants concurred that their stepfamily relatives mistreated them, excluded them from family activities, and reminded them that they were strangers. The participants shared the following:

“My stepfather’s family somehow made me feel like I am not wanted,, which I understood because some cultures like the Ndebele culture, [do] not prefer children out of wedlock”. (Participant 1)

To a larger extent, relatives of the stepparent made the young female participants feel uncomfortable by treating them like outsiders. One participant said:

” I was discriminated [against] and reminded every time that I am not one of them. Being reminded that I do not know my father, they did not include me in most activities, and they always [told] me that I don’t belong with them and I have to go out there and look for my father”. (Participant 4)

There is a general misconception that biological children are more valuable than non-biological children. Segal et al. (2015) declare that evolution has influenced social parenting in that social parents have evolved with the inclination to serve their biological children’s needs rather than those of their unrelated children. In stepfamilies this can

manifest in extended family members, either grandparents, uncles or aunts, viewing stepchildren as undeserving of a place in their families. Mansson and Booth-Butterfield (2011), established that biological grandparents are more affectionate towards their grandchildren than their non-biological grandparents. In support of this assertion, Gray and Brogdon (2017) state that step-grandmothers provide less care, financial assistance, and emotional closeness to their step grandchildren in comparison to biological grandmothers. While the case of the grandmothers' attitude towards their step grandchildren, there is a lack of information on the attitudes of extended stepfamily members towards stepchildren. Extended family members include uncles, aunts, and cousins. In this study, participants indicated that their social father's side of the family were very reluctant to accept them as part of the family.

4.5 THEME 3: THE INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIAL FATHERS IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG FEMALES

Although the term 'parental involvement' is broad, Kennedy et al. (2021) concur that parental involvement includes parents' behaviours and activities in relation to their children's school activities. In this study, the term 'parental involvement' refers to parents' overall commitment to their children's social and academic realms. Parental involvement also includes providing financial assistance to their children. Graham (2010) claims that even though there has been an increase in stepfamilies, many people are still confused about parental roles and behaviours that stepparents can engage in for the benefit of children. It is often difficult for stepparents to be enthusiastically involved, particularly in adolescent's lives due to adolescents' developmental stages and needs. Cabus and Ariës (2016) indicate that an addition to the family unit often leaves young children vulnerable to a lack of parental engagement, more so than grown-up children. Nonetheless, when parents are actively involved in their children's lives, children tend to have positive outcomes as opposed to when they are neglected due to lack of parental engagement. On that note, two themes emerged, namely social fathers providing academic support and or withholding financial support.

4.5.1 Providing academic support

In this study, it emerged that not all stepfathers shy away from playing the parental role of supporting their stepchild's educational performance. This finding is in contrast with Njoroge and Kirori (2018), Perales et al. (2017), and Whitney et al.'s (2017) findings, as they emphasise that children raised by stepparents perform poor at school. Participants in the study shared their experiences with their social fathers and how it affected their school performance. One participant stated:

"I was excelling because my stepfather was helping and providing motivation by taking us out and buying a cake each term when we pass". (Participant 1)

Another participant said:

"His presence and being there for me helped. I felt safe to do my school work when he was in the house, since my mom used to come home late. Again, he used to pick me up when I had extra classes or give me money for transport to attend weekend. He will attend school meetings and ask about my grades, unlike my mom". (Participant 3)

The development and education of children is strongly associated to family structure and parental involvement. Several studies have revealed that when homes, schools, and society collaborate, they can help the student to achieve sound educational performance and improve education systems (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Tran, 2014). In other words, children who get support from parents who are emotionally and behaviourally involved and collaborate with teachers are likely to perform better in school. The situation might not be the case for children raised by stepparents as Van Houdt et al. (2020) found that stepparents are less involved in children's lives than their biological parents. Mbatsane (2014) found that children growing up in the presence of both biological parents perform better than children living with in other family arrangements. Children from non-traditional families, particularly in families with stepfathers, perform poorer than those from traditional families (Njoroge & Kirori, 2018; Perales et al., 2017; Van Houdt et al., 2020). In a study conducted on various father types, it was established that children raised by stepfathers are vulnerable to low achievement because they struggle to accept the

separation from their biological parents and receive less attention from their stepfathers (Whitney et al., 2017). Due to the perceived lower investment from stepfathers, stepchildren respond negatively and experience conflict with their social fathers. In this study, it emerged that most stepfathers showed no interest in the young females' academic performance. One of the participants stated:

“My stepfather was not bothered about my results. Even when he was free to attend parent’s school meetings, he would choose hanging out with his friends”.
(Participant 6)

Another participant said:

“Living with my stepfather mostly affected my school performance during Covid-19 when I was studying from home. I had to bear with the negative energy at home at the time [to] ensure that I do well academically”. (Participant 4)

The aforementioned findings demonstrate that stepfathers were present, but not involved. Due to the lack of paternal involvement, young females experienced psychological distress, which led to poor educational performance. Munyua and Disiye (2020) proposed that toxic parenting in a family environment is likely to negatively affect academic results of children. Due to adverse school performance achieved at school, Duffy et al. (2018) and Urme et al. (2018) opine that children may see suicide as a way of preventing the pain of failure. The situation could be exacerbated for young children whose stepfathers abuse substances as their intoxicated state prevents them from realising their stepchild's struggle. In this study, it emerged that some stepfathers prioritised their friendships over their young female stepchildren, which might be the reason why these stepfathers were not fully involved.

4.5.2 Lack of financial support

Financial circumstances are likely to improve for children during parental remarriage (King et al. 2015). This occurs as a result of having double financial contributions from both the mother and her new partner. Unlike individuals from single parent families, Amato and Kane (2011) underscored that young females raised by remarried parents usually obtain

qualifications other than high school because their social fathers are financially contributing towards their studies. In support, Ganong et al., (2019) claim that stepfathers strive to create friendships with their stepchildren by spending money on them. In other words, financial assistance from stepfathers is often their strategy to strengthen the closeness in stepfather-stepchildren relationships. In this regard, Van Houdt et al. (2020) posit that the support that children receive during family transitions can enhance their overall well-being. In this study, some participants reported that their social fathers financially maintained them. This is illustrated by the following statements:

“My stepfather supported me financially. He always took me out for shopping and ensured that I have Christmas clothes”. (Participant 3)

Another participant said:

“Yes, my stepfather was financially supportive and ensured that I have everything that I need”. (Participant 5)

Although the abovementioned participants were financially maintained, another participant stated that her social father raised his dissatisfaction about her behaviour whenever she needed financial assistance. The participant stated:

“My stepfather used to complain that I am wasting his money and had many issues. Whenever I made a mistake, he would mention all the things that I have done and burst”. (Participant 2)

One of the participants believed that her stepfather always used financial reasons to scold her, she mentioned that neither of her parents were financially supportive, yet had the expectation that she would support them.

“I moved from home to stay with friends. Both my mother and stepfather never asked if I had transport money or what I am going to eat. They do not care that I am job hunting, and they expect me to support them financially”. (Participant 4)

From the above findings, it is evident that not all social fathers are financially exclusive regarding their stepchildren. This is in line with Klaus et al. (2012) findings, in which it was

reported that social fathers have an inevitable relationship with their stepchildren due to the intimate relationship with their mother, hence, they find themselves catering for their stepchildren's financial needs. However, Kinniburgh-White et al. (2010) claim that stepfather's treatment of their stepchildren varies, as some stepfathers are able to provide both emotional and financial support, while others can only provide the latter. In this study, findings show that some stepfathers were both emotionally and financially available, while others cared less about the circumstances that their stepchildren had to live under. Moreover, the participants whose social fathers deny them financial assistance may become insecurely attached and resort to dating 'blessers' (sugar-daddies) to attain the material possessions that they long for.

4.6 THEME 4: THE COPING MECHANISMS USED BY YOUNG FEMALES

Coping mechanisms are strategies that individuals use to defend themselves during life-threatening situations such as health issues, family disputes, or the loss of a loved one. These strategies assist people to prepare and manage stressors, as well as to establish ways to deal with their situations (Makwana, 2019; Napoles et al., 2022). Furthermore, several authors have stipulated that people can manage stress through reactive and proactive measures (Algorani & Gupta, 2022; Neubauer et al., 2019; Vaculíková, 2016). Reactive measures refer to the actions taken during a traumatic event, whereas, proactive measures refer to premeditated measures for future trauma. In other words, resilience to a traumatic experience can be established before or during the trauma. Roming (2018) adds that when people are stressed, they develop strategies to mitigate their stress and these strategies can either solve the problem or lead to negative consequences. Various researchers have found that stepfamilies experience many more stressors than biological families because they are unacquainted with each other's ways of dealing with stress (Ganong et al., 2022; Garneau & Pasley, 2017). These researchers are all in agreement that stepfamilies can reduce stress by creating close relationships, communicating more effectively, and being flexible. During data collection the following subthemes emerged as the coping mechanisms used by young females raised by social fathers: prayer; support from maternal family; and substance abuse.

4.6.1 Prayer

Religion and spirituality play an important role in the mental health of individuals and women are no exception. A study conducted on undergraduate university students to determine the relationship between prayer and stress have revealed that prayer reduces stress and anxiety during traumatic situations (Schwartz, 2007). Matlakala (2022) asserts that Africans view prayer as the most efficient strategy for dealing with anxiety and stress. Moreover, Park et al. (2020) indicate that women commonly use multiple emotion-focused strategies like distracting themselves from thinking about their problems and seeking emotional and religious support. For instance, these women can interrupt negative thoughts through crying, journaling, talking to their pastors, or reading multiple scriptures. In this study it was evident that participants perceived religious support and emotionally soothing methods as defence strategies to circumvent or alleviate some of the difficulties that they experienced during their upbringing. One participant stated:

“I cry, write my feelings down, and I pray. I might be too Christian, but I feel like this is a spiritual fight”. (Participant 4)

Another participant said:

“Going to church to sing and worship was helpful when I was stressed. I would often come back to find my mom and stepfather calm”. (Participant 5)

The above findings demonstrates that praying and reading biblical scriptures can assist to ease the challenges that young females raised by social fathers experience. Young females may seek comfort from the book of Isaiah 41:10 which reads thus for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand". Through reading the scripture, young females may feel strengthened and ready to face their challenges heads on. Equally, the support that these young females receive from church might assist them to accept their circumstances, which is noble for their healing process.

While other participants used prayer, another participant indicated that she often cries when distressed.

“I do not like to talk too much, when stressed; my pillow and diary become my friends. I will write down my experiences and then cry until the pillow is wet. After crying, then I will be calm”. (Participant 7)

The above finding indicates that some of the young females believe that crying and journaling helped them to cope and manage their feelings. These strategies are supported by Drageset et al. (2010) who emphasise that there are chances of positive relief for women who articulate their feelings through crying, speaking, or writing. These strategies have proven to negate the depersonalisation feelings and improve the physical and psychological wellbeing of individuals. Therefore, when young females cry and journal their feelings, they are likely to perceive themselves positively even when they are experiencing challenges.

4.6.2 Support from significant other

Receiving support during stressful situations can enhance an individual's ability to develop resilience. Study participants claimed that they relied on people such as their grandparents, friends, and partners to get through the challenges that they experienced living with their social fathers. They stated that their grandmothers welcomed them and provided emotional and financial support. This is illustrated in the following statement:

“I was a mess, to a point where I had to pack my bags and move out of home to stay with my grandmother”. (Participant 4)

While the other participant received support from her grandmother, another participant mentioned that she received support from both her grandmother and her romantic partner because her mother was always too busy with her own life. She said:

“I talk to my grandmother and partner about most things, because my mother is always occupied”. (Participant 3)

Distant family and friends often play a critical role of assisting individuals to adjust to separation and remarriage of their parents. Studies by Xie and Xia (2011) and Hu (2020) show that grandparents usually consider their grandchildren as their own, and take

responsibility for their care in the absence of their parents. These authors maintain that grandparents invest their energy and resources in their grandchildren, and usually have no problem retiring from their jobs to support their grandchildren. However, Westphal et al. (2015) claim that such provision of support to grandchildren is most likely to come from maternal grandparents rather than paternal grandparents, because children typically live with maternal grandparents subsequent to the separation of their parents. Furthermore, Rodrigues et al. (2017) attest to the fact that friends and romantic partners become the most important sources of support during early adulthood as parent-child relationships change. In light of this, it can be deduced that young females in this study found it easier to communicate with their friends and romantic partners when they were feeling down, rather their grandparents in order to avoid appearing that they take sides.

4.6.3 Substance use and abuse

Substance abuse is a major societal issues, particularly among young people. According to Masiko and Xinwa (2017) and Sahu and Sahu (2012), the abuse of alcohol and drugs is a growing problem in many countries, with adverse consequences for health, security, relationships, social and moral values, and national productivity. Substance abuse is the use of substances such as alcohol, marijuana, bhang, hashish, cough syrups, sedative tablets, heroin, cocaine, and tobacco that can affect how an individual feels, thinks, and behaves (Sahu & Sahu, 2012). Additionally, Neaigus et al. (2013) and Peltzer and Phaswana-Mafuya (2018) claim that people who engage in substance abuse are at a risk of experiencing psychological distress and changed behaviours, such as engaging in unprotected sex and the use of dirty needles to administer drugs, both of which can lead to serious viral infections. However, participants in this study indicated that they used substances to numb their pain during stressful situations. One of the participants stated:

“I normally prefer going out for drinks with friends as a way [of avoiding] being with my stepfather in the house”. (Participant 2)

Another participant said:

“When I feel like there is a lot of noise and I am blamed for things I did not do, I often go to chill with my friends and drink some Savannah and smoke hubbly bubbly”. (Participant 6)

From the aforementioned findings, it is evident that participants couple alcohol and music to manage their stress. A previous study on young female drinking indicates that they are likely to consume too much alcohol when drinking in an environment with music, as opposed to drinking in a quiet place (Stafford & Dodd, 2013). Thus, it is reasonable for the researcher to deduce that young females in the study may abuse alcohol because of the stress they endure at home. What is alarming is the fact that when intoxicated, these young females might be exposed to sexual abuse and rape at alcohol outlets or worse, at home.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter mainly discussed the data collected through semi-structured face to face interviews with young females raised by social fathers. The social fathers in the participants' lives included stepfathers and a grandfather. Despite the presence of social fathers, the findings reveal that young females still experience feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, a diminished sense of belonging, fear, and an inability to voice their concerns. These feelings were perceived in association to sociocultural factors such as being discriminated, lacking a biological father-child relationship and support from their biological mothers, as well as an inability to adjust to their new living arrangements due to tension and strained relationships with extended family members. Moreover, the study findings indicate that some young females received academic and financial support from their social fathers, while others had social fathers who were present but not involved in their lives. To a larger extent, some social fathers wanted to be financially dependent upon the young females, instead of financially supporting them. To cope with the challenges of growing up in a stepfamily, young females in the study developed coping strategies. These coping strategies involved praying and worshiping God, receiving support from significant others, and indulging in substances.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed at describing the lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers in the Driekop community in Limpopo province, and the study was interrogated through the lens of Attachment theory. This study adopted a qualitative approach and a phenomenological research design. Data was collected through face to face interviews to gain insights into the lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers, and data was analysed through an inductive thematic analysis. The study produced three major findings, which were the central part of the discussion section. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, draws conclusions from each major finding, and presents the study's recommendations.

5.2 SYNCHRONISED MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, the researcher briefly discusses major findings and provides answers to each research objective. The section also covers conclusions and the study's recommendations.

Objective 1: To identify psychological challenges faced by young females raised by social fathers

The objective was achieved. The study findings revealed that young females experience significant psychological challenges due to growing up with a social father. Some of the challenges that have been found are presented hereunder.

- **Feelings of worthlessness**

The study findings demonstrate that children growing in stepfamilies may face challenges emanating from both the stepparent and the stepparents' family. The young females in the study reported having challenging experiences and reported feeling that they were

not considered good enough for their stepfathers. These feelings led them blame themselves for how their social fathers reacted towards them and developing feelings of worthlessness. In response to this, the researcher recommends counselling for young females living with social fathers to explore the implications of the introduction of a social father into their lives and develop strategies they might need to manage this challenging situation.

- **Sense of loneliness**

Opposite to nuclear families wherein bonds are formed between couples before they have children, stepparent families must find balance between nurturing both their children and their own new relationship. Unfortunately during this process, children's feelings are often ignored, leading to children developing feelings of rejection and loneliness. In this study, young females reported lacking warmth and love from their social fathers to the point of believing that their biological fathers would have done better than their social fathers. Additionally, the participants indicated that the absence of their biological fathers left them feeling empty and alone as they longed to be loved by them. Thus, the researcher recommends an educational programme to teach fathers about the importance of being present in their children's lives and how their absence negatively affects their children's lives.

- **Lacking a sense of belonging**

A sense of belonging in a family can eradicate various psychological and behavioural challenges. The study participants reported lacking a sense of belonging in their stepfamilies because their social fathers had other children and favoured them, rejecting their stepdaughters, which made them feel excluded from the family unit. Due to the fact that the young females experienced the absence of their biological fathers from a young age, they found it difficult to interact with their social fathers and form stable father-child relationships. The researcher recommends that stepfamilies should seek support from qualified family health or mental health practitioners to receive training on how to form relationships.

- **Inability to open up**

In this study, it was established that young females are unable to open up to their parents when they experience harassment. These young females also indicated that their social fathers did not understand the implications of their stepdaughter's developmental stage. In light of this, it is concluded that there is a miscommunication between young females and their social fathers due to the young females' developmental stage and social fathers not grasping the implications thereof. Thus, the researcher recommends that social fathers should be offered more education on the transition stage of young females.

- **Preoccupation with abuse**

In this study, some participants indicated that they lived in fear of being abused by their social fathers. Meanwhile others feared being abused by their social fathers, others and were additionally afraid that their children would endure the same challenges should they break up with their children's father. In light of this, it is concluded that the presence of social fathers intimidates young females and causes anxiety for them. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be an awareness campaign that encourages young females to talk openly and report any form of abuse from their social fathers.

Objective 2: To determine the coping mechanisms used by young females raised by social fathers

The objective to determine the mechanisms young females use to cope while being raised by social fathers was achieved. The study findings show that young females utilise strategies such as prayer, support from significant others, and substance abuse to cope with stressful situations that emanated from their family situations. The coping mechanisms of these young females are presented below.

- **Prayer**

In this study, it was determined that participants perceived religious support and emotional soothing methods such as crying, journaling, talking to their pastors, or reading multiple scriptures as a defence against the difficulties that they experienced during their upbringing. Thus, it can be concluded that praying and reading religious scriptures can

assist to ease the challenges that young females raised by social fathers experience and help them heal.

- Support from significant others

In this study, it was determined that majority of participants preferred confiding in their significant others during challenges. To be precise, the significant others that the participants sought support from were either their grandmothers or romantic partners. This indicates that family does not mean those who are blood relatives but it includes those who assist in difficult times. Hence, young females in this study saw their romantic partners as someone to confide in.

- Substance abuse

In this study, participants indicated that substance use was a coping mechanism during stressful situations. Moreover, some of the participants preferred taking substances and playing music to cope with stress. This indicates that young females depend on substances when they experience challenges.

Objective 3: To appraise the influence of social fathers on the school performance of young females

The objective was achieved. The study findings revealed although some social fathers were active in offering academic and financial support to their stepdaughters, there are social fathers who failed to provide this support to the young females. The findings are presented below.

- Providing academic support

In this study, some participants indicated that their social fathers were supportive towards their school activities, while other participants revealed that their social fathers showed no interest in their academic performance. This shows that some social fathers are present in the lives of young females, but they are not involved enough to assist the young females to perform better at school.

- Lack of financial support

In this study, some participants indicated that their social fathers were financially supportive while other participants shared that their social fathers raised their dissatisfactions about their behaviour whenever they needed financial assistance. This shows that young females are dealing with social fathers who suppress their emotions when their stepdaughters make mistakes, and later experience emotional outburst due to the pressure of providing.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a summary of findings and illustrated the conclusions of each major finding. Moreover, the recommendations of the study were also incorporated in the summary of the major findings.

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ANNEXURE A: INFORMED CONSENT

Topic: Lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers: A case of Driekop community, Limpopo province, South Africa.

NB: due to POPIA Act, the participants will not write their names nor sign the consent form but verbally consent to participate in the study after having read the consent form.

I, the participant, agree to participate in the research project. titled “**Lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers: A case of Driekop community, Limpopo province, South Africa.** The information has been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I understand that agreeing to participate means I am willing to be interviewed by the researcher.

The researcher has explained and I understand that:

- The information provided is confidential.
- My participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time without penalties if I do not wish to continue.

ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

May you explain how is it to be raised by a social father?

Probe How is your relationship with your social father?

Probe

Does your social father contribute to your social needs? Probe

How is the mood in the house since your social father moved in with

you? Probe How is your relationship with your biological father? Probe

Did your mother discuss with you the new living arrangements with your social father? Probe How is your school performance since you moved in with your social fathers? Probe

Who is the first person that you talk to when you experience challenges? Probe

Mametletšo B : Tlhahlo ya poledišano

1. Na o ka hlaloša gore go bjang go godišwa ke tate wa leago? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo
2. Tswalano ya gago le tatago wa leago e bjang? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo
3. Na tatago wa leago o tsenya letsogo go dinyakwa tša gago tša leago? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo
4. Maikutlo a bjang ka ntlong ga e sa le tatago wa leago a hudugela go wena? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo
5. Tswalano ya gago le tatago wa madi e bjang? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo
6. Na mmago o ile a boledišana le wena ka dithulaganyo tše difsa tša go phela le tatago wa leago? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo
7. Tiragatšo ya gago ya sekolo e bjang ga e sa le o hudugela go botate ba gago ba leago? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo
8. Ke mang motho wa mathomo yo o bolelago le yena ge o itemogela ditlhohlo? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo.
9. Na o dutse le tate wa leago sebela sese kae? Nyakišišo ya go dira bjalo.

ANNEXURE C: SSREC APPROVAL LETTER



University of Limpopo
Faculty of Humanities
Office of the Director
School of Social Sciences
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 2683, Fax: (015) 268 2230, Email: sello.sithole@ul.ac.za

21 September 2022

NAME OF STUDENT: Ms KM Rantho
STUDENT NUMBER: 201704735
DEPARTMENT: Psychology
SCHOOL: Social Sciences
QUALIFICATION – MA in Psychology

Dear Student

SCHOOL APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE

It is a pleasure to inform you that in its meeting of 21 September 2022, the School of Social Sciences Research & Ethics Committee recommended the approval of your application for ethical clearance. Without delay please apply directly with TREC in order for a certificate to be issued.

Your title was approved as follows:

Lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers: A case of the Driekop community, Limpopo province, South Africa.

Note the following:

Ethical Clearance	Tick One
In principle the study requires no ethical clearance, but will need a TREC permission letter before proceeding with the study	
Requires ethical clearance (Human) (TREC) (apply online) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	✓
Requires ethical clearance (Animal) (AREC) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	

Yours faithfully

Prof SL Sithole
Director: School of Social Sciences

Supervisor: Mr K Mashaba

ANNEXURE D: ETHICS CERTIFICATE



University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 4713, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: moore.hutamo@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: 28 FEBRUARY 2023

PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/60/2023: PG

PROJECT:

Title: Lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers: A case of Driekop community, Limpopo province, South Africa.
Researcher: KM Rantho
Supervisor: Mr K Mashaba
Co-Supervisor/s: N/A
School: Social Science
Degree: Master of Arts in Psychology



PROF D MAPOSA
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

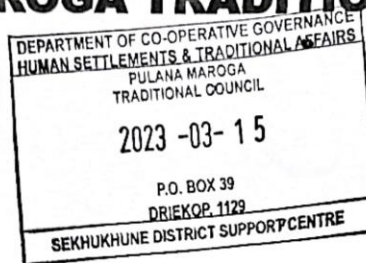
The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

Note:

- i) This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.
- ii) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.
- iii) PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

ANNEXURE E: PERMISSION LETTER

PULANA MAROGA TRADITIONAL COUNCIL



Eng: S. MADIGAGE

Tel: 073 4736 380

Box 310

Driekop

1129



DEAR SIR/MADAM

Re: Permission to interview young females for academic research by Katlego M.Ranθο for Master's in Psychology

To whom it may concern

The tribal council has been approached by Ms Katlego Magdeline Ranθο to request for permission to interview young females on the "Lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers at Driekop village". The tribal council would like to grant permission to the researcher to proceed with her study

Yours sincerely

S. MADIGAGE
(ADMIN OFFICER)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Madigage', written over a horizontal line.

ANNEXURE F: LANGUAGE EDITOR'S LETTER

Isabella Morris
writer and editor

Isabella Morris

isabellaza@hotmail.co.uk

+20 106 334 2397

01 November 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: CERTIFICATE OF EDITING – Katlego Magdeline
Rantho**

I hereby advise that I edited Katlego Magdeline Rantho's thesis "**Lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers: A case of Driekop community, Limpopo province, South Africa**" submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Psychology degree in the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of Limpopo.

Please note that I have not had sight of the manuscript since editing, with KM Rantho either accepting or rejecting suggested changes, as is usual.

Should you have any queries, do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

M. I. MORRIS

Isabella Morris
M.A. (Wits)

Professional
Editor

ANNEXURE G: RESEARCH ADVERT

You are invited to participate in the research study!!!

The study aims to describe the lived experiences of young females raised by social fathers in the Driekop community, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

In order to participate you should be:

1. Black young females raised by social fathers;
2. Young females residing in Driekop, Limpopo province; and
3. Young females aged 18-24

WHAT WILL BE EXPECTED OF YOU?

- You will be expected to participate in a face-to-face interview for a maximum of 45 minutes;
- Data will be collected from March to April 2023

Participants will be provided with refreshments during the interviews

Ethics no.: TREC/60/2023: PG

If you would like to participate please contact Katlego Rantho: 081 522 2230
Email: magdeline.rantho@gmail.com



YOUR PARTICIPATION WILL BE GREATLY APPRECIATED