

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The psychological experiences of the participants were not only based on the absence of their fathers, and there were other factors which must also be considered when interpreting the results. These factors include the characteristics of rural life in South Africa, and the cultural background from which the children came, such as perceptions about marriage, the roles of men, women and children, education, religion and family processes. Aspects such as these formed the context in which the research took place. Neuman (1997) states that qualitative researchers emphasise the importance of the social context for understanding the social world. The meaning of a social action or statement depends in an important way on the context in which it appears.

The literature review discussed in Chapter 2 will be used in the interpretation of the results. As will become evident below, in some cases, the results differed from the findings reported in the literature review, because of the differences in cultural backgrounds and socio-economic status of the participants. Another reason why the findings of the present study differed from that of previous studies, could relate to the reasons for the absence of the father. Most of the research reported in the literature focused on a particular reason for the father's absence, such as that the parents were either divorced, separated, never married, children from teenage pregnancies or families where a spouse deserted the family. The findings varied accordingly, depending on the reasons for and nature of the father's absence. In the present study no restriction was placed on the reasons for the father's absence, except that children whose fathers had died, were not included. It is thus possible that processes related to a particular reason for father absence, might not apply to other situations.

5.2 FAMILY BACKGROUND

The family background of all the participants was characterised by low cohesiveness, conflict, and instability. All the participants were abandoned by their fathers either due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth or a teenage pregnancy where the mother did not marry the father of the child.

None of the participants got help from their fathers or had contact with their fathers on a regular basis. In instances of unwed mothers, this could be related to the cultural background of the community, namely that *ngwana ke wa kgomo*, which means that the biological father has no right to see and financially support a child if he did not marry the mother. The people in the community believe that, if the biological father becomes involved with his child, he may use that as an advantage to become involved with the mother, and this may result in conflict in the family. If the mother had married someone else, the conflict, which could result from the involvement of the biological father, could lead to divorce. The belief system related to *ngwana ke wa kgomo* thus provides the child with emotional and family stability, since there will be no other man living in a separate household trying to maintain a relationship with the child. The person who married the mother of the child is called the father, and provides a father figure to the family. However, this does not always have a positive outcome, because some stepfathers abuse their stepchildren, for example by telling them they are not legitimate children of the family.

The custom described in the previous paragraph does not only deprive the child of the opportunity of meeting his father and getting some financial help, but in some cases also creates tension in the family. For instance, when the child is extremely sick and his or her condition does not improve with treatment, it is common to interpret the sickness as complaints by the ancestors of his/her biological father. The child then needs to be taken to his/her biological father's place to plead to the ancestors.

Although the children who participated in the study wished to get help from their fathers and wanted to get in touch with them, these feelings seemed to be suppressed by this cultural practice and the children had to accept it. They had to endure the situation because they were

aware of the norms and values of the community, knowing they cannot win the case traditionally, since *ngwana ke wa kgomo*.

The child's relationship with an absent father becomes more complicated for those children whose fathers abandoned them after marriage, because culturally their mothers are expected to tolerate their situation until their husbands come back. In such instances, no one can replace the biological father, although other male family members such as uncles and grandfathers could fulfil the role of father figure. If the wives do not comply with these norms and values of their community, they lose respect from members of the community, as it is said "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi", which means that a woman should stay with her in-laws until she dies, regardless of the conditions of her life. In addition to this, her children may also experience inner conflict, in the sense that they knew their biological fathers and once lived with them, and now he had left them.

A further factor which contributed to the family instability the children experienced, was related to the family not being united due to poverty. The latter resulted in either the participant him-or herself, or a sibling, having to stay with a member of the extended family. The children at times moved from one family to another in their efforts to survive. Kotze and Van der Waal (1995) also observed that members of black rural families often move among relatives' households as a survival strategy. This also reflects the important role played by the extended family in providing support to their relatives.

Mclanahan and Sandefur (1994) state that children of divorced or separated parents move more often than occurs in intact families. Sometimes, the change in residence is due to a change in family size. When the father moves out of the house the family needs less space, and the mother may choose to move to a less expensive dwelling. When a mother remarries or when a boyfriend or grandmother moves in, more space may be needed, and the family may move again. In the present study, none of the mothers moved together with their children from one home to the other. However, there were instances where the children moved from one relative's household to that of another, and the main reason for this was that they were not treated well in the first family. The effect of this, however, would be similar to that which would occur if the whole family had moved from one place to another. On the one hand, this created instability in that the children were often required to adjust to new environments, which could

release may be directed inward in the form of self-destructive behaviour, or outward in the form of aggressive acts.

These children were dependent on their extended families and received support from them, but at the same time they experienced stress. Lazarus and Folkman (in Sorensen, 1993) point out that stress should not only be defined in terms of major life events such as bereavement, divorce or chronic illness, since such a view would limit the concept and overlook a large constellation of factors that affect health and adaptation. Ordinary daily life is filled with what is termed "hassles", which includes recurring friction between family members, or continuous financial insecurity. In the present study the participants were getting stress from daily relationships with members of the extended family and worries about money to fulfil basic needs.

Although these children experienced hardships in the extended family, they had no alternative, because their lives would have been even more difficult without their relatives. Most of the participants depended totally on their grandparents. Although the situation discussed above was partially brought about by the absence of the father (the participants said that they suffered because their fathers were not there for them), it was also due to the general poverty which prevails in rural areas. This situation was aggravated by the cultural beliefs and practices described above.

5.3 REASONS FOR FATHER ABSENCE

As stated in Chapters 1 and 3, the participants were selected on the basis of father absence due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth or teenage pregnancy. The reasons the participants gave for their fathers' absence, included witchcraft, irresponsibility of the father, and family conflicts.

Religious beliefs may also have contributed to father absence, because it increases the chances of unplanned pregnancies, which may end up in the father leaving the child and the mother. Churches such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), do not allow their members to use contraceptives, because it is believed that it would encourage women to become involved in multiple love affairs. Apart from these religious beliefs, the methods used by traditional healers

to prevent pregnancy are not reliable, because many women fall pregnant while using it. This method involves tying a rope with muti on the waist of the woman and untying it when she wants to bear children.

The fathers' abandonment of their families, could also be related to the socio-political background of South Africa, where many men have become migrant labourers working in urban areas, while leaving their wives and children at home in the rural areas. In previous times, they were forbidden to bring their families with them and thus they were forced to live separately from their families for long periods of time. It has become part of the culture of the community where this study was done, for wives to stay at home with the children while their husbands go out for employment in the urban areas. Although many men care for their families while working as migrants, it is also not uncommon for them to have relationships with other women in the urban areas. Especially in earlier times (but continuing at the present time), this deprivation of normal family life was a prime cause of broken family relationships and personal demoralisation (Pomeroy, 1986).

However, the participants blamed their fathers for leaving the families and not the history of the country. According to them, there is no problem when a man lives without his family because he is looking for work in an urban area, but he must come back home, either monthly, fortnightly or weekly. A common accusation by the participants was that their fathers were womanisers, and that was why they left them.

Not all participants attributed their fathers' absence to him as a person. Two participants believed that their fathers left because of witchcraft. They said it was witchcraft, because they knew that their fathers loved them, and they could not understand why they had left their families. Harmful events in the community, that are beyond human understanding and control, are often interpreted as witchcraft. Thus the belief in witchcraft can be seen as a defence mechanism used to cope with unfavourable conditions one is going through.

Family conflicts were blamed for the disintegration of the families. The view was also expressed that it was possible that the mothers still held a grudge against the fathers and would not welcome them back. Thus, the mothers were indirectly blamed for the fathers not returning. Indirectly related to this, is the finding of Ears (1989) that some teenagers feel angry

towards their mothers for not being able to stop the father from leaving the family and according to Rubin and Prince (in Gunard, 1982), some children become angry with their mothers for either causing the divorce or driving the father away.

Not all the children knew what had driven their fathers away, and they wanted to know from their mothers or their fathers why they left them. They were left with unanswered questions about why their fathers left them. Some participants reported that their mothers told them why the fathers left, but they did not understand. This was probably because the mothers did not give them full information. This might have been the result of the cultural belief that parents are not supposed to discuss private marital matters with their children. For example, if a parent discusses sexual issues with a child, and if the child does something wrong, it is believed that it is because his or her mother involved him/her with adult matters. Thus, one child said that she did not ask why her father left because it is an adult matter, and she was not supposed to be involved. This is also done to protect the children from their parents' problems, but it has the negative consequence of leaving them with unresolved conflicts.

5.4 PATERNAL SUPPORT

None of the participants got financial or emotional support from their fathers. There are various likely explanations for this. One reason could be the belief system related to *ngwana ke wa kgomo* discussed in paragraph 5.2. This relates to the view that a biological father has no right and access to his child whose mother is married to another man, and thus also does not support the child financially.

Another reason for the lack of paternal support could be that some mothers did not even apply for child support from the father, because they felt they could not depend on it. There are instances known to the researcher where mothers received money for only one or two months, and then it stopped. Since they did not know how to deal with the matter, they just accepted whatever happened and opted for a solution they were familiar with, namely to get married to another man, rather than to fight for child support from the biological father of the child. It is also likely that poverty lead them not to insist on their rights since it would have meant that they had to incur expenses, such as travelling costs. McInahan and Sandefur (1994) also noted that in many countries, child support systems cannot be relied upon to ensure support from

uncooperative fathers. According to these authors, some fathers do not pay child support, because they are unable to monitor and control how the money is spent and suspect that the money is used to help other members of the household and not the children themselves.

There is also a cultural belief that if a mother gets child support from the father of her child, he (the father) may bewitch the child, by killing him/her or causing some psychological disorder (i.e., "lefofonyane") in retaliation for his money being taken away by force. As a result, mothers may not apply for or insist on the father's support, in an effort to protect their children from witchcraft.

5.5 NEED FOR A HOUSE/HOME

A distinction can be drawn between the words *gae* and *ntlong*. The former means having a home, which includes having a stand. It also has the connotation of belonging somewhere. *Ntlong* has a more physical connotation in the sense of a permanently built structure to live in.

The participants from families where the mother never married, and said they wanted their own home. Most of the unmarried women stayed with their parents, because it is not common for an unmarried woman to have her own house/home in the community, while their children felt that they did not belong to the family (i.e., the grandparent's family). These children indicated that this cultural belief oppressed them since they needed their own home, where they could experience happiness and freedom, even though it would not have been proper in the community for their unmarried mothers to establish their own homes, since a family without a man lacks respect and dignity. The wish for a home could thus have been an expression of a need for belongingness.

Those children who were from divorced or separated families already had a stand, perhaps with a temporary physical structure or semi-completed house on it, but they needed a proper house. They either wanted to extend the existing house, or build a new one, since their fathers failed to build it for them. A person is known by his or her belongings and actions. The house of a person reflects what kind of a person he is. For example, a tin house may indicate either the absence of a man or it may reflect negatively on the person and family. It thus reflects aspects of the person's identity. Since a house is for the family, it also implies the identity of all

the family members, including the children. To the extent that a house provides identity to the person and family, it also provides dignity and respect for a particular family. In terms of Erickson's developmental theory, the participants were in a stage in which they had to define their identity, which included their values and ideals, and their position within society (Louw, 1991). Having a proper house could thus, perhaps symbolically, help people to establish a positive identity.

Having a house could also be interpreted in terms of the satisfaction of needs. According to Maslow (1970), there are several basic needs that must be met before an individual can function effectively in the environment. He postulates that until those needs are met, an individual will not be able to move towards further growth. In terms of his theory, a house or a home relates to different levels of needs. On the one hand, it relates to basic physiological and safety needs in that it provides shelter and security. It also involves being with one's family, which relates to feelings of love and belongingness. At the same time, as was described above, it relates to the need to experience a sense of significance, and to receive respect from significant others (Cooperman, in Lloyd, 1985).

5.6 FINANCIAL SITUATION

All participants reported financial constraints in their families. Their mothers were either not employed, and if they worked as domestic workers around the village, they earned insufficient money to meet their needs. Some of the participants tried to help their families by working part-time, for example by repairing shoes, radios and television sets, doing gardening, or selling sweets and peanuts. This reflected that the children did not succumb to the problems they had to face, but took responsibility to assist their families.

The children reported that they lacked food and clothing and depended on their extended families for support. The financial constraints of these children may also be related to poverty in rural areas, and not necessarily to their fathers' absence. Mahabeer (1989) states that the financial problems of single parents are often due to low socio-economic status (SES), and not necessarily father absence only. Poverty in rural areas in South Africa is illustrated by the findings of the South African National Scientific Programme (SANSP) (1985), which attributed poverty to such things as ineffective farming practices and inadequate educational facilities.

The SANSP study was done almost 15 years ago and at the present time, there are developments, which include equal opportunities for people from all races to apply for financial help from the government, for example for farming or for community development. However, despite this governmental help, people in rural areas still face poverty.

The cultural view of the community that a married woman is supposed to be a housewife, could also have contributed to the financial problems of the families where the participants of this study came from. It is the role of the wife to be the housekeeper while her husband works and earns an income for the family. In a related context, Berman and Pederson (1987) state that one of the most important roles of the father is to establish the family's socio-economic status. In the community where the study was done, married women often only start looking for a job after a husband had left the family and such jobs usually have low salaries, as the participants reported. One participant cried when speaking about the members of the community who ridiculed her mother when she went to work, and she also said that her brother was not happy about the situation. He wanted his mother to stay at home like other women, but he could not help to resolve this because he could not get a job.

Against the background of the poverty in which they grew up, some participants said they wished to help their parents first when they are grown-up. Two boys said they would only get married after helping their parents, such as building a big house for them and their siblings, so that they do not suffer as the participants did. Responsibility to help parents could be seen as a cultural norm of the community. Parents expect their children, especially boys, to help them financially. This often happens, and one can readily observe in the community where the study was done that children build houses for their parents, pay school fees for their siblings and buy them clothes, or provide other financial help. This could create conflict for the children, because a son has his own needs such as building his own house, while at the same time he is expected to satisfy his parents first and to continue assisting them. Failing to satisfy the parents' needs may create conflict between the parents and the sons.

Conflict may also occur between a husband and his wife, since the latter may want her husband to concentrate on his own wife and children, while the husband may want to prove that he is not controlled by his wife and could do whatever is needed to please his parents. As was described in Chapter 2, a husband who is subservient to his wife is believed to be

bewitched by her. Complying with the norms and the values of the community could cost men their marriage, and they might leave their children suffering.

5.7 SOCIAL SUPPORT

All the participants got social support from people in their environment. The support came from friends, teachers, the church and relatives. This helped them to deal with the problems they experienced. The fact that the relatives and friends who offered support also provided them with stress, could have made them stronger so that they would be able to adjust to unfavourable life conditions. Since they had nowhere to go, they had to learn to cope with the stress they experienced.

According to Sutherland and Cooper (in Louw & Edwards, 1993) many studies show that social support can lessen or eliminate the negative effects of stress. Belonging to a network of relationships with people who can be counted upon to help, provides people with a sense of security and feelings that one is cared for, esteemed and valued. Heller (1984) states that one of the most important resources in coping with environmental stress is the presence of people who act as a natural support system. People who have good social support systems tend to have fewer symptoms of both physical and mental disorder in the face of stress.

Friends also played an important role in helping the participants to deal with life challenges in the absence of their fathers, by providing them with advice and material things. Cooperman (in Lloyd, 1985) state that the peer group provides a social context in which adolescents learn attitudes and skills relevant to adult functioning, which cannot necessarily be taught in the family. It also helps adolescents to cope with their marginal status, that is, they provide a sense of belonging during a time in which youth have left the childhood culture behind, but have not yet fully entered adulthood.

5.8 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL AND FUTURE GOALS

All the participants perceived school positively and gave different reasons for this. Two participants viewed school as good, because it provided them with "the light for life" such as being able to read and write, and to be able to speak English when looking for a job. These

were basic reasons for getting education, rather than having high ideals such as matriculating or getting tertiary education. One reason for this could have been financial constraints in their families due to the father's absence. This means that they were not motivated to complete their education at secondary or tertiary level, and their expectations of learning were low. This might have reduced their motivation to work hard at their schoolwork, because they had low ambitions such as only being able to read and write. This could have been reinforced by the relative lack of a culture of learning in the area where the study was done, with the result that many children are not really competitive and ambitious with regard to furthering their education. Many children leave school to look for a job before finishing secondary school. This may be seen as an easy way to find a way of life that matches the standards they set for themselves.

Mclanahan and Sandefur (1994) state that a lack of financial resources affects children's willingness to invest in themselves, by lowering expectations and motivation. The youth that do not expect to go to college or university, even though they might have the ability, are less motivated to work hard in high school than youngsters who expect to go for tertiary education. Ears (1989) also stated that divorce could result in children becoming low achievers.

However, the low motivation did not apply to all the children. Six of them said they performed well academically. One said, "I know that I am gifted academically". Another one said that she was capable, but she was not studying very hard. There were also some children who wanted to continue with their education after leaving school, but they were not sure as to whether they would be able to do so because of financial problems. They all complained about food, clothing and shelter which relate to the lower level needs in the Maslow hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow (1970), one needs to satisfy the lower level needs (physiological and security needs) before moving to the higher levels (self-actualisation and self-esteem needs). These children were aware that they might not be able to get tertiary education, because they struggled to get food and clothing. They also lacked knowledge about various careers and the resources (such as bursaries and student loans) to further their studies.

Four of the participants perceived school also as a place where they could meet friends and get away from family problems. Here the school is not only perceived as an institution to supply people with knowledge, but as a place to meet friends, to socialise and get advice from other people. Some of the children mentioned that they did not enjoy being at home, and the

school helped them to get a chance to be happy and to be in a positive mental state for a short period of time. The school thus played a role in enabling the children to cope with their situation. This is linked to Cooperman's (in Lloyd, 1985) view that schools, in addition to providing formal education, also provide a physical environment in which adolescents spend most of their time and which is the centre of peer culture.

The participants did not only have positive views about school. They complained about the high failure rate, teachers who were in love with schoolgirls, teachers going on strike, corporeal punishment and their friends who were playful and teased the teachers. This may indicate that they were aware of what is acceptable in society, and that they wanted to maintain the moral values of society. They were concerned about their own well-being, and that of other children and the teachers. This may also indicate a need for order and justice at school.

5.9 INTERPERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

One child said that his friends looked down upon him because his father left the family and another one said that some of his friends ascribed things he did to him being fatherless. In the DAP there were some indications that five participants could have experienced poor social interest and one girl said she did not have any friends. Lamb and Sagi (1983) also found that boys of divorced parents become more isolated from their male peers and instead they prefer to play with young children or girls, maybe because they feel more comfortable with younger children than with their peer group.

Three participants described aggressive behaviour towards their friends. On the DAP and KFD there were also indications of anger. Similarly, Biller (1993) also found that children whose fathers were absent showed aggressive behaviour.

In contrast to the foregoing, the participants in this study generally enjoyed being with their friends. They got advice and companionship from their friends. Others got food for lunch from their friends, and two participants said that they enjoyed it more to be with friends at school than being at home. This reflected good interpersonal adjustment.

One possible reason for the positive adjustment of the participants could relate to the hopes of the participants. Although the participants had unfavourable life conditions at home, they had hope in life and they also felt that life wouldn't always be so negative. They thought that one-day they will have their own homes, work for themselves and improve their living conditions. According to Frankl's theory (Ivey, Ivey & Morgan, 1997), these participants searched for purpose in life and they had the power of the human spirit to survive under difficult conditions. They confessed that life was unfair to them, but they coped with it. A factor which could have contributed to their coping, was the social support they received from their extended family members, friends and teachers from school, and from the churches, which helped them to adapt to their circumstances constructively.

Another factor that could have helped the participants to cope with their life circumstances, could have been their cognitive maturation that enabled them to develop a sense of power and control. Cooperman (in Lloyd, 1985) states that adolescents need to experience a sense of power to deal with the environment effectively. The sense of power in adolescence is related to the person's cognitive development. Piaget noted that adolescence is characterised by a major change in cognitive functioning, which includes the ability to understand and manipulate abstract conceptual issues. Developing this skill enhances adolescents' potential for understanding and gaining control over their environment. Having a sense of control is an important resource to help people cope with stress (Sorensen, 1993). So this may also be interpreted as having contributed to the participants' ability to maintain good interpersonal relationships.

5.10 PERCEPTION OF SELF

According to Mruk (1995), self-esteem is defined in terms of feelings of competence and worthfulness. He posits that feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness and anxiety are associated with low self-esteem.

According to the literature, children from homes where their fathers are absent, often have negative self-concepts. Hethermpton (in Ears, 1989) stated that adolescent girls who lost their fathers because of divorce and death, were inclined to have negative self-concepts and were more insecure. Dominian (in Gurnad, 1992) claims that a child from a divorced family may

believe that he or she is no longer acceptable to other people. If the mother doubts her own ability to attract or to hold a man, a little girl who believes she is like her mother might feel unattractive and feel that she is likely to be rejected by men. Various other authors, such as Mruk (1995), Adams, Milner and Schrepf (in Potgieter, 1986), Biller (1993) and Wallerstein (in Ears, 1989) have also observed feelings of incompetence, insecurity, a poor self-concept and feelings of shame amongst children from families where the father was absent, for example as a result of divorce.

The results of the present study showed that some children's self-concepts were not shattered as would be expected from the literature. They felt accepted by others, felt good about their progress at school, and were optimistic about their abilities to progress in life.

Although the participants felt insecure because they were young, they also felt that they were capable of making a good life when grown-up. They also did not deny that children who have fathers have more good things than they had, but they felt that they could still progress in life, as others do. They had hope about life, which might have been influenced by the social support they received. Jaunch (in Mahabeer, 1989) state that support by the extended family may mitigate some of the negative social stigma often associated with single parents.

However, this did not apply to all the children. It was especially in the DAPs and KFDs of some of the children that a lack of security, feelings of helplessness, dependency and a need for support from the external environment was evident. One girl also said she performed poorly at school. She already had a child but her boyfriend deserted her, and she wished to get married to an older man who would care for her. One could interpret this as reflecting low self-esteem, in that she could have thought that she cannot hold or get a man of her age, a belief which could have been reinforced by the fact that the father of her child left her.

In summary, some children's self-concept was affected negatively, but this did not apply to all the children. Whether a child's self-concept would be affected negatively or not, depends on his or her individual development and factors in the environment, such as the acceptance and support he or she gets from family members and other people in the environment.

5.11 SEXUAL IDENTITY

Sexual identity problems may be experienced by boys who grow up in the absence of their fathers. Ears (1989), for example, reports that father absence has a detrimental effect on the development of masculinity in sons since there is no role model for sons in the family. In the present study, however, with the exception of one boy and one girl, the participants did not show any signs of identity confusion. The boy, who had lost both of his parents, drew two pictures on the DAP without any sex differentiation. He stayed with his uncle and aunt and their two daughters, but the uncle spent most of the time away from home working in the cities. There was thus not a consistent male authority figure in the house with whom he could identify. In addition, he related that his aunt sometimes did not give him money for school, whereas she would give her own children money. He also stated that one of his aunt's daughters did not want him in the house. These feelings of rejection could have contributed to problems in the development of a clear sense of identity.

One girl drew the person of the opposite sex (male) first in her DAP. Although this could have reflected sexual identity confusion, this was not very clear-cut and it could have related to her attachment to her grandfather, who she said was the most important person in her life.

The absence of sexual identity problems may be interpreted in terms of the communal life in rural villages. Where the children grew up in extended families, there were always other adult males (e.g., grandfathers and uncles) who represented male authority figures and with whom the children could identify.

5.12 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MEN

Almost all the participants did not trust men, and gave reasons such as that men are capable of killing, raping, abandoning their own offspring, having extramarital affairs, transmitting sexual diseases to their wives, and impregnating schoolgirls. One girl thought she would never get married since she did not regard men as trustworthy. Two of the girls said that they wanted to get married only after having completed their studies or after being employed, so as to be able to maintain their children should their husbands leave them. This could be interpreted as a result of them living without a father and they thus expected that what had happened to their

parents could also happen to them. The participants' views regarding men thus reflected that they failed to develop trust in men.

5.13 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Almost all participants perceived marriage positively. They all wanted to get married when grown-up, despite the failure of their parents' marriages. Marriage, to the participants, was associated more with care, than with love itself. Although care is one aspect of love, it was more often emphasised than any other aspect, such as companionship or sexuality. For example, some participants said that marriage provides the children with two parents to take care of them. One girl said that she wanted to get married to an older person so that he could take care of her. She said that her friends were married to older men, and those men were taking good care of them. Another girl also did not regard marriage as a bond based on love, but as a way to get out of her unfavourable family environment. The need for care was also reflected in the way in which two boys anticipated their own future: they said that they wanted to get married, but they did not want their children to suffer as they (i.e., the participants) did.

The reason why they were more preoccupied with the need for care than any other aspects of love, could be that these children were deprived of their fathers' care. This is related to the view of McInahan and Sandefur (1994), that when the father lives in a separate household from that of his children, he sees the children less often and this may undermine commitment and trust between the children and their father.

Although marriage was viewed positively, the participants also expressed uncertainty about it. One girl, who had a child but was deserted by her boyfriend, said she did not believe she would get married. As was indicated elsewhere in this chapter, two of the girls said that they wanted to get married only when they were working, so that they would be able to take care of their children should their husbands leave them. They feared that what had happened to their parents, might also happen to them and this reflected uncertainty about their own future. It also indicated uncertainty about whether they would be able to cope if marital problems were to arise one day. According to Ears (1989), children raised by their mothers after divorce expressed uncertainty about getting married, for fear of not being able to cope with it and thus repeating the mistakes of their parents, and this may then become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Cultural views about marriage might also have reinforced positive attitudes towards marriage among the children. Women are supposed to be married and belong to their husbands' *kgoro* (clan) to get respect and dignity within the community. A family without a father, except in the case of the death of the man, is not respected in the community. There are different kinds of marriages in the community which ensure different ways for women to go to another clan, rather than to establish their own home. A woman may become a second wife in polygamous marriage, whilst others become married to a family (*go nyalwa ke lapa*). The latter literally means to be married to the family, which means to be married to an old couple or an old granny, just to belong somewhere and to be cared for. Such a woman may still have children, either from a man of her own choice, or a man delegated by the *lapa* (family) she married.

The male participants might have felt positive about marriage or said that they wanted to get married, to prove that they could do better than their fathers did, since they were prepared to take care of their parents' family together with their own. One participant said he did not want his children to suffer like they (the participant and siblings) did because of the absence of his father. This may also be interpreted as a way of establishing his identity in the sense that he wanted to carry out his male responsibilities and become known as a good person.

5.14 BOYFRIENDS OF THE MOTHER

Six of the participants reported that their mothers did not have any dates with male friends. Two said some men came to visit their mothers, but they thought that they came for some important reason (such as work matters), rather than to seduce their mothers. Only two said they experienced problems with dates of their mothers; the reasons for this were that the man might hurt the mother, and that the man had his own family and he should not leave them.

The above six participants might not have wanted to disclose their mothers' personal and private affairs to the researcher. Telling private matters about their mothers might have implied that they lacked respect for, or belittled their mothers. In the community where the study was done, parents and children do not talk to each other about sexual matters. Parents also hide extramarital affairs to protect their personal image and to ensure that their children regard them as loyal to them. They also protect their children from being exposed to their lovers before

marriage, because the children may feel bad about the behaviour of their mothers, and also because it is possible that a lover may desert the mother and she may then later have other boyfriends. It is also possible that the mothers might have been involved with boyfriends, but that the children were not aware of that.

The two children who said they saw men at their home, but thought they came for some other reason and not for their mothers, might have been denying the truth of their mothers' sexual relationships. Since sexual relationships outside marriage is not acceptable and leads to a loss of respect, they might not have felt proud of what their mothers were doing, and they thus attributed another reason to the visits by the men, to protect themselves from feeling ashamed of their mothers' behaviour.

The reasons why two children disapproved of their mothers' affairs with men, could be explained as follows: One felt that the mother could be hurt by the man. However, during the interview she did not provide any information to substantiate this fear. This created the impression that there might be another reason why she disapproved of the matter. It might be that she did not want her mother to be involved, because it would devalue her image in the community. The reasons which the second girl gave for disapproving of her mother's involvement with men, links with this. She was afraid that her mother would be confronted (insulted) by the wife of the man, and this would have degraded the mother. It would also have been against the values of the community if he were to leave his family because of his affair with another woman.

5.15 EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Six participants reported unfavourable conditions at their homes which they had to endure since they were too young to take care of themselves and they also had nowhere else to go because of poverty. They said that if they had money, they would have left their extended families because it is possible to have one's own house/home without the parents being married, although this is not culturally approved of.

In addition to their financial insecurity, they also experienced emotional insecurity. It was indicated elsewhere in this chapter that the children experienced feelings of helplessness,

dependency and a need for support from the external environment. This was most likely related to their feelings of being rejected and of not being loved, either by their father or by some other family members. They did not feel secure and settled in their families. They felt the people who were supposed to take care of them deserted them.

This feeling of desertion could explain the anger reflected in the DAP pictures of seven participants. Three also expressed their anger verbally during the interview. That anger was a reaction to insecurity and rejection, which was evident in one girl who said that she would never accept her father, because he had failed to buy her new clothes after her birth at the hospital, and she left the hospital naked. The anger here must not be interpreted as a sign of delinquency but as an expression of her feelings about the absence of her father. Blaming the father by the participants, as is discussed elsewhere in this chapter, could also be interpreted as an expression of both conflict and anger regarding the fathers. Various authors, including Sullivan (1953) and Horney (1937) have described how anger and aggression occur as a reaction against feelings of insecurity.

However, as was indicated above, despite the feelings of helplessness, they still had hope that one-day life would be better. They hoped their mothers would get jobs and that when they are grown-up, they would be able to have what they needed to live adequately. Their positive attitude was most likely related to the encouragement they got from friends and relatives.

5.16 CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion showed that many of the findings of the present study could be interpreted with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 as well as the cultural background of the selected population. However, with regard to some of the themes, there were differences between the findings of the present study and other studies. It must also be borne in mind that other factors, in combination with father absence, may contribute to the psychological experiences of these children. The factors include, for example, the prevalent poverty in rural black villages and local cultural beliefs.