

**FATHER ABSENCE: PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES  
OF BLACK RURAL ADOLESCENTS**

**BY**

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## SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to describe the psychological experiences of black rural adolescents in the absence of their fathers due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth and teenage pregnancy. As far as it could be determined, no study has yet been done in South Africa regarding this topic.

A qualitative research method was selected for this study. The participants consisted of ten adolescents, five boys and five girls from a rural area in the Northern Province. Data was collected by means of personal interviews, Kinetic Family Drawings (KFD) and the Draw A Person test (DAP).

The interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The information was firstly organised and arranged to form a coherent and understandable story. The data was then analysed by means of the analytical comparative method. Themes were identified and related themes were grouped into categories. The information from the DAP and KFD were analysed according to each technique's theoretical framework, and integrated with the themes and categories identified in the interviews.

The following categories were identified: family conditions in which the children lived, which included the role of the extended family; the nature and impact of financial problems; social support; perceptions about school and future goals; interpersonal adjustment, self-concept and sexual identity of the children; their perceptions about men and about marriage, and their views about their mothers getting involved with other men; and emotional reactions. These themes overlapped and influenced one another. The results were interpreted in terms of previous research, the cultural background of the participants and the context of life in rural villages.

Recommendations are made with regard to promoting financial independence from welfare among single mothers, child support, social support and counselling, and dealing with teenage pregnancies.



## KEY WORDS

Adolescents

Rural

Father absence

Family conditions

Financial problems

Interpersonal adjustment

Self-concept

Future goals

Emotional reactions

Social support

## OPSOMMING

Die doel van die studie was om 'n beskrywing te gee van swart, landelike adolessente se sielkundige belewenisse rakende die afwesigheid van hulle vaders (vanweë egskeiding, vervreemding, verlating of ongehude tienerswangerskap). Sover vasgestel kon word, is hierdie onderwerp nog nie vantevore in Suid-Afrika nagevors nie.

'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetode is gevolg. Die deelnemers het uit vyf seuns en vyf dogters, afkomstig uit 'n landelike omgewing in die Noordelike Provinsie, bestaan. Persoonlike onderhoude, Kinetiese Gesinstekeninge (KGT) en die Teken-'n-Mens toets (TMT) is gebruik om data in te samel.

Bandopnames is van die onderhoude gemaak en dit is daarna transkribeer. Die informasie is eerstens herorganiseer om 'n samehangende verhaal uit te maak. Die data is daarna aan die hand van die analities-vergelykende metode ontleed. Temas is geïdentifiseer en verbandhoudende temas is in kategorieë groepeer. Die inligting wat deur middel van die KGT en TMT bekom is, is aan die hand van die teoretiese rasionaal van hierdie tegnieke ontleed en die resultate hiervan is met die kategorieë en temas wat uit die onderhoude identifiseer is, geïntegreer.

Die volgende kategorieë is geïdentifiseer: die gesinsomstandighede van die kinders, insluitende die rol van die uitgebreide gesin; die aard en impak van finansiële probleme; sosiale ondersteuning; opvattinge oor skool en doelwitte vir die toekoms; hulle opvattinge oor mans, die huwelik en verhoudings van hulle moeders met ander mans; interpersoonlike aanpassing, self-konsep en geslagsidentiteit van die kinders; en emosionele reaksies. Hierdie temas het met mekaar oorvleuel en mekaar beïnvloed. Die resultate is interpreteer in terme van vorige navorsing, die kulturele agtergrond van die deelnemers en die konteks van lewensomstandighede in 'n landelike stat.

Aanbevelings is gemaak oor hoe enkel-moeders aangemoedig kan word om finansiële onafhanklik te wees van bystand uit welsynsfondse, asook aanbevelings oor kinderonderhoud, sosiale ondersteuning en berading, en die hanterig van tiener-swangerskappe.

## **KERNWOORDE**

Adolesente

Landelik

Vader-afwesigheid

Gesinsomstandighede

Finansiële probleme

Interpersoonlike aanpassing

Selfkonsep

Toekomsdoelwitte

Emosionele reaksies

Sosiale ondersteuning

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The absence of a father from a family could have different effects on the growing child. According to Biller (1993), closeness with a father can be especially important in fostering the child's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. Mruk (1995) describes self-esteem in terms of a sense of competence and worthiness; accordingly, low self-esteem is associated with feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness and anxiety.

Holman (1977) and McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) point out that the father is primarily responsible for the economic security of the family. Therefore, in the absence of the father, there may not be sufficient income for the maintenance of the family. This may contribute to the child experiencing social or peer rejection, or to the child isolating her-/himself because she/he does not fit in with his/her friends. For example, the child may lack proper clothes or pocket money, and this could make him/her to feel different to the peer group.

The children may also not aspire to go to for tertiary education due to a lack of financial resources when the father as the only source of income is absent from the family. Thus, a lack of money may demotivate the child to continue with tertiary education. It might also affect the child's academic performance. The child may be more preoccupied with the need for food, the need to fit in with her /his peer group and the need for family security, than to focus on education.

When there is no income in the family, the members may be compelled to move to cheaper housing, or to move to the woman's parents, or the mother may try to get a job away from home to support and educate the children. This may create instability and insecurity for the children.



Ivey, Ivey and Morgen (1997) contend that the family environment of antisocial individuals is frequently full of neglect and abuse, and the dependency needs of such individuals are not met. It is possible that these children, if they fail to cope with the problems of father absence, may resort to activities that are detrimental to themselves and to the community, like becoming involved in crime, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as prostitution. Engaging in such activities may partly be a compensation for feelings of inferiority and worthlessness.

It is, however, possible that the communal nature of traditional African society (Mbiti, 1969), and the important role that extended families play, may compensate for the absence of the father. A child is often regarded as *ngwana wa rena*, which means the 'child belongs to everybody' - i.e., the members of the extended family. The latter participate in the child's upbringing, and other male relatives could fulfil the role of a father.

At the same time, it must be borne in mind that many of the traditional customs, values and norms of African society have undergone radical changes, partly as a result of the influence of westernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation. It is thus possible that the communalism of traditional African societies may no longer prevail to the extent that it compensates for the absence of the father. It is also possible that the older generation may identify with the traditional norms and values, whereas the younger generation may have adopted different norms and values. Furthermore, the harsh economic realities in rural areas may make a child from a relative an unwelcome visitor and an "extra mouth to feed" in an extended family.

As far as it could be determined, no study has yet been done in South Africa regarding the impact of father absence on black adolescents in a rural area. This study aims to shed light on how both boys and girls experience this.

## 1.2 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to describe the psychological experiences of rural black adolescents, both boys and girls, in the absence of their fathers (which may be due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth and teenage pregnancy).



### 1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The reasons for conducting the study in a rural area and to involve both girls and boys are as follows:

The researcher lives in the rural area where this study was conducted, and has come across many fatherless children. One of the reasons why fathers desert their families is that they often go to work in the cities due to a lack of job opportunities in rural areas. Migrant labour, in turn, often results in estrangement between spouses, and the breadwinner (husband/father) not supporting his family adequately. A fatherless child is thus a common phenomenon in rural areas. In addition, it is possible that there are mediating factors in rural areas that alleviate the impact of father absence, such as the role of the extended family, a communal life-style, and cultural values. Whether factors such as these indeed play a role in how children experience the absence of their fathers is, however, unclear.

Traditionally, black fathers place great value on the birth of a son, since sons ensure that the name of the family will continue. Although the contact between fathers and daughters is usually limited, this does not mean that there is no impact of father absence on girls. For both girls and boys, having a father contributes to feelings of security, knowing that there is someone who cares for one, and who could help one to deal with the challenges of life. The presence or absence of a father could thus affect the psychological well-being of both boys and girls.

In the area where the present study was conducted, the fathers are mostly the only source of income for the family. They provide economic security for the family and in the absence of this, both boys and girls are affected, even though the effect may be different on boys and girls.

The focus is on adolescents because of the following reason: According to Erickson (Louw, 1991) adolescence is the stage of identity versus role confusion, in which adolescents need to resolve the crisis of role confusion by stabilising their sense of identity. To address this, adolescents need emotional, physical, moral and financial support, which are usually provided by the parents and the community. It is thus possible that the absence of a father during the

child's adolescence, may deprive a child of the necessary support, and thus it may have detrimental effects on the child's identity development.

The possible impact of the research results on the community include the following:

- Conducting this research may highlight the needs of children who grow up in the context of father absence, and the extent to which the current child-support system is effective in addressing their financial needs. The results could shed light on specific aspects which must be addressed by policy makers in this regard.
- The study might also shed light on the role of the father in the development of black adolescents, and how important it is for him to be available for his children, financially, emotionally, morally and physically.
- In general, the study might provide information, which could be used in support programmes amongst teenagers, aimed at assisting them to deal with the vicissitudes of life in the absence of their fathers.

#### 1.4 PREVIEW OF THE STUDY

A qualitative research method was used. In qualitative research, according to Kvale (1996), the researcher focuses on meanings and the context rather than measuring variables. A qualitative research method works with words, not numbers, and is aimed at obtaining rich descriptions of relevant aspects of the interviewee's life world.

Five boys and five girls participated in the study. They were selected according to the following criteria:

- (a) They had to be in middle or late adolescence.
- (b) They had to reside permanently in a rural village.
- (c) The child's father had to be absent from the family, due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth or teenage pregnancy; this excluded instances where a father had died.
- (d) The participants had to be willing and able to articulate the information needed.

Data was collected through face to face interviews, and by using the Draw a Person test (DAP) and Kinetic Family Drawings (KFD). Descriptive and interpretative statements about the

drawings were obtained from the children. During the analysis, themes were identified in the children's narratives and the KFDs and DAPs. These themes were organised into categories on the basis of similarity of concepts, and the relationships among concepts were examined. The results were then interpreted in terms of the literature reviewed, the culture of the community and the context of living conditions in a rural village. The method that was used, is described in more detail in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 2, relevant literature is reviewed. This includes literature on relevant aspects of the political and the social-historical context of South Africa, which provides the background for this study; literature on rural black families and the cultural background of the selected population; literature on father absence, the role of the father, and adolescence. In chapter 4 the results of the study are reported, and the results are interpreted in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 comprises a summary of the main findings, an evaluation of the study, and recommendations are made.

regarding the researcher's relationship with the community (background) and intimate knowledge of the community (the researcher's personal participation in various activities and projects in the community).

## 2.2 SOCIAL-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The social-historical context of South Africa seems an obvious starting point for this study, as to father absence, the researcher's personal participation in various activities and projects in the community.

### 2.2.1 Division of labour

According to Prinsloo (2007) the history of the societies of all the leading world countries, where black and white societies are usually exposed to discrimination. Prior to South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 blacks, who are the majority of the population, were the victims of migration and deprivation by the white minority. They occupied the lowest proportion of land (13%), and the remaining 87% was controlled by whites in the form of 'homelands'. These homelands were called Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatane, Bantustans, Qwa-Qwa, Venda, Gazankulu, KwaNdebele, and Natal.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature will be reviewed in terms of the following topics: relevant aspects of the historical and socio-political background of South Africa; the black rural family; perspectives on adolescence; reasons for father absence, the role of the father, and the life experiences of children in the absence of the father. The cultural background of the selected population will also be addressed. In the discussion of the above-mentioned themes, reference will be made to relevant theoretical frameworks. In some instances, the information that is reported regarding cultural practices is based on the researcher's longstanding and intimate knowledge of the community where the study was done, her personal participation in various cultural practices, and interviews conducted with people in the community.

#### 2.2 SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The socio-political context of South Africa seems to be an important factor contributing not only to father absence in rural families, but also to the type of life experiences children go through.

##### 2.2.1 Division of land

According to Pomeroy (1986), racism is present in the societies of all the leading western countries, where black or other non-white minorities are usually exposed to discrimination. Prior to South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 blacks, who are the majority of the population, were the victims of oppression and deprivation by the white minority. Whites occupied the largest proportion of land (87%), and the remaining 13% was provided for blacks in the form of 'homelands'. These homelands were called Transkei, Kwazulu, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, Lebowa, Qwa Qwa, Venda, Gazankulu, KwaNdebele, and KaNgwane.

Blacks were supposed to stay in these homelands, but the land was not of satisfactory quality to ensure sufficient production for economic survival (Pomeroy, 1986).

## 2.2.2 Migrant labour

Rural black men are often migrant labourers, moving from rural areas to work in urban areas (Pomeroy, 1986). In the cities, they usually stay in hostels with bare facilities. In previous times, they were forbidden to bring their families with them and thus were forced to live separately from their wives and children for long periods of time. They either had to carry a permit to seek work, or have proof that they were employed, and had to go back home when their contracts expired, or when they were no longer strong enough to work, or if there was no work for them (Dvorin, 1952; Pomeroy, 1986). This disruption of normal family life, which resulted from the system of migrant labour, was a prime cause of destroyed family relationships and personal demoralisation.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that a child's development is enhanced through the presence and participation of other parties like spouses, friends and relatives. Furthermore, there should be links between settings which allow people to move from one setting to another, for example reciprocity between the home setting and an employment setting of a father. If such parties are absent or play a disruptive role, as occurs when fathers are absent from their families, the effective functioning of the family system is disrupted and the development of the child negatively affected. It is like a three-legged chair: it is more easily upset if one leg is broken or if one leg is shorter than the others.

Pomeroy (1986), Dvorin (1952) and Giliomee and Schlemmer (1989) assert that the policies implemented by the previous white government made African workers to lose their humanity and self respect, and therefore their urge to resist exploitation and injustice was destroyed. Investors depended on cheap black migrant labour, and these labourers used to earn lower wages compared to whites, even if they were doing the same job. This contributed to financial power being concentrated primarily in the hands of the white sector of society. This exploitation dated back to the time of British colonial rule:

*“British colonial rule itself, it must be stressed, reinforced the oppression of black majority, treating them as cheap labour on which colonial fortunes were made. It*



2.2.2 *was black labour, in appalling conditions, which dug out gold and diamonds in the deepest pits” (Pomeroy, 1986, p.6).*

Marks and Unterhalter (in Booyesen & Hattingh, 1997), argue that apartheid, which in terms of Bronfenbrenner’s theory formed part of the macrosystem, located male workers at the site of urban production and tied women to rural locales. However, black men are no longer forced to live and work apart from their families. With the dawn of the new democratic order in South Africa, blacks are no longer confined to work under appalling conditions where work permits are required, salaries are meagre and where they are separated from their families. Rural black men may bring their families to the cities and this could lead to a decrease of children growing up without a father due to migrant labour. However, as a result of limited work opportunities in rural areas, it is unlikely that migrant labour will completely disappear. Rural people may continue to be forced to look for an income in the urban areas and, due to economic realities, it may be impossible for them to bring their families with them. Indeed, one can observe, in the area where the study was done, that many men still have a home in a rural area, while working in urban areas.

### 2.2.3 Education

According to Pomeroy (1986) the former racial segregation in the education system lead to gross inequalities in every aspect of education. Per capita expenditure for white school children was higher than that for black school children. White schools were well equipped, while black pupils had to attend classes in inadequate facilities; sometimes shacks or sheds were used for a school, and many of those schools did not have toilets and other facilities. The dropout rate of black pupils in the course of primary school has been enormous. Even those wanting to go to secondary school were frustrated because there was an insufficient number of secondary schools, and children often had to walk long distances to neighbouring villages to attend school.

Without proper education these children were destined to become unskilled migrant labourers when grown-up. They also could not stand for whatever they believed they were deprived of, because lack of education means lack of intellectual resources to fight for your rights. They were actually not empowered to resist exploitation.

## 2.2.4 Self-esteem

Although the transition to democracy has brought in its wake educational and other reforms, the legacies of apartheid have not been eradicated. Many men are still migrant labourers, and many youths still do not attend or finish their secondary education. Some blacks (especially the uneducated, rural, poor) still regard themselves as inferior to whites in terms of intelligence, physical appearance and general standard of life. This makes them to have low self-esteem.

This can be interpreted in terms of social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which postulates that people compare their own groups [ingroup(s)] with other groups [outgroup(s)], to determine the extent to which their own groups provide them with positive self-esteem. The more positive people's perceptions of their ingroup(s) are, the more positive their self-esteem is. Through the process of social comparison, a status hierarchy is established, and high status groups are perceived to be relatively superior to others, with positive characteristics attributed to them. In contrast, low status groups are perceived as inferior, and negative characteristics are attributed to them.

When people's group membership does not confer positive distinctiveness on them, they may follow various strategies to restore their self-esteem. These strategies include social and psychological mobility. The former entails leaving the ingroup physically, or dissociating oneself psychologically from it, and aspiring to attain membership of a higher status group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). If this is not possible, psychological mobility may occur; this means that members of a low status group assimilate positive characteristics of the high status group. This, according to De la Rey (1991), is commonly expressed as preference for the attitudes and behaviours associated with the high status group.

If people fail to develop positive self-esteem through identification with the outgroup (e.g., whites), which could occur when efforts to move socially upwards are blocked, they may endeavour to attain positive self-esteem within the context of their own group. In Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) this is termed social creativity. The latter entails discarding a negative image of the ingroup by either creating new dimensions of comparison with an outgroup, or re-interpreting the ingroup's ascribed negative characteristics in a positive way. Values and a way of life could, for example, be justified in positive terms. In the context of the



present study, this could mean, for example, defining a good father as someone who is supposed to be a migrant labourer, but who comes home every month-end.

## **2.3 THE RURAL CONTEXT**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

The following information is aimed at providing understanding of family life in rural areas. However, care must be taken in generalising these descriptions, since the information is specifically applicable to the area where the study was conducted. The selection of particular descriptions is based on the researcher's knowledge of the area. Each village in a rural area has its own way of life, even though some characteristics are shared across villages. There are areas which are more developed than that where the study was done, and therefore may differ from some of the information provided.

The information may also help in understanding the research results, because the children's experiences may not only depend on the absence of their fathers, but also on the more general conditions under which they live.

### **2.3.2 Physical characteristics of a rural village**

Kotze and Van der Waal (1995) conducted research in a rural area in the Northern Province and describe the following physical characteristics of the village: There were scattered households situated on the residential stands of the village, which were often fenced to keep livestock out of maize and vegetables planted around the homesteads. Few people owned cattle and more people had goats, and some kept donkeys for ploughing and transport of purchases, firewood and building materials.

### **2.3.3 Ways of survival**

Poverty is common in rural areas. In the study by Kotze and Van der Waal (1995), there were differences in the life of each household and its individual members. Economically active men were mostly migrant labourers, working in Gauteng, others were working around nearby towns

as government servants. Very few people had secondary education. Women were mainly working on the white owned farms and some men did not allow their wives to work there, suspecting that they would be tempted to have lovers. Families often have many dependants, and migrants remitted only a small portion of their income home.

According to Kotze and Van der Waal (1995), the people they studied used all kinds of economic strategies to survive, like exploiting informal economic opportunities such as donkey cart transport, subsistence agriculture, building, or selling beer and vegetables. Women and girls entered into temporary sexual relationships in anticipation of gifts of money from their temporary partners.

Fuel for heating and cooking is mostly obtained from firewood collected in the veld by women. Where this is illegal, the women are at risk of getting fined by government officials and they are also at risk of getting raped (Kotze & Van der Waal, 1995; South African National Scientific Programme Report (SANSP), 1985). Some blacks also use cow-dung for heating the house and cooking.

#### **2.3.4 The role of the extended family**

Nielsen (1987), and Kotze and Van der Waal (1995) found that families in rural areas depend on their extended families for emotional and economic support. In general, the members of the extended families are interdependent on one another. However, these authors differ in some respects, since they conducted their research in different countries. Nielsen conducted his research in New York and found that migration to urban areas posed a threat to extended families, since family bonds were likely to be broken by distance. Kotze and Van der Waal (1995) conducted their research in South Africa. They found that the more men moved to urban areas for work, the more the family members remaining in the rural areas depended on each other, and members moved between households as a survival strategy.

This may be regarded as reciprocity, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, because children get food, clothing and at times attend school while at the same time helping the members of that family by doing home chores and looking after the livestock. The environment benefits from the child while the child benefits from the environment.



### 2.3.5 Farming

The findings of SANSP (1985) indicate that rural people largely depend on agricultural activities and on owning livestock for their survival, even though these enterprises are not productive enough to create prosperity. In the following paragraphs, some of the factors which constitute obstacles to successful agricultural production and livestock farming among rural blacks, will be discussed.

Due to migration of rural men to urban areas, a large number of households are headed by women, and consequently agricultural activities are given less attention, as much time is spent on household chores. Collection of water and firewood involves walking long distances, and this keeps part of the labour force tied up in non-agricultural activities.

Small-scale black farmers are at a disadvantage compared to large-scale white farmers with regard to receiving government subsidies for fertilisers, drought relief, tax and rail rebates, etc. Although the present South African government has increased financial help for small-scale farmers, the people are not likely to apply for help to the extent as would be expected. The reasons for this could include that black people often lack trust in themselves with regard to production efficiency, they may lack knowledge of how to apply for assistance, and may be discouraged when applications are turned down or when there are delays in replying to applications. It might also be difficult for black farmers to change their accustomed habits of agricultural practice.

One characteristic of the agricultural practices in rural black areas, has been that of subsistence farming. Enough food is produced for each household, without surplus from which expenses for needs such as better housing, clothing, education and other requirements could be met. In instances where products such as beans, peaches etc., are sold, the profit is usually low since 'everyone is a farmer' and people provide for themselves. There is generally also a lack of resources to improve productivity with the view to make a living out of agriculture. Typically, the land is used until its natural fertility is exhausted and a transfer is made to new fields and grazing areas.



Cattle farming played, and continues to play, an important role and this is reinforced by cultural beliefs. A person's status and riches are determined not only by the quality of meat and milk from his herd, but also by the size of the herd. The possession of many cattle means wealth and provides the individual with respect and dignity from the community. It is thus less likely that a person would sell some of his cattle as a source of income. Selling cattle would often also not provide a high income because, due to a lack of farming resources, herds tend to have worms or other diseases, and consequently lose value.

The traditional value attached to owning large herds of cattle has contributed to the destruction of valuable land due to over-grazing, and this in turn also contributes to a lower level of income from farming. Waiting for the rains to relieve malnutrition among starving cattle, and failure to castrate poor quality stock or to dip stock, exacerbate the situation.

There are some religious beliefs that play a role in cattle farming. This includes that a particular cow, called *kgomo ya badimo*, is believed to belong to the ancestors and it is not supposed to be slaughtered or sold. It is believed that the absence of that cow may cause poor reproduction or death in the herd.

A subsistence level of existence leaves little scope for accumulating sufficient wealth to live optimally in the complex environment created by modern society. Thus, farming practices such as those described above, are likely to contribute to people being preoccupied with satisfying the lower levels of needs described by Maslow (1970), namely physiological and security needs. This may inhibit developing towards satisfying esteem and self-actualisation needs.

A lack of transport and marketing facilities also contributes to low prosperity. Even today some people in the rural areas do not know how to market their products commercially, which may be a result of lack of education or a lack of farming skills.

To the extent that the above factors contribute to inefficient farming, and thus to lowered income, they also contribute to the poverty prevalent in rural areas. It is important to bear in mind that the poverty experienced by children whose fathers have become estranged from their families may thus not only be due to the father not helping to maintain them. Broader social, cultural and economic factors also play a role.

### 2.3.6 Gender categorisation

Kotze and Van der Waal (1995) contend that rural black men constitute the dominant gender category, demanding submission from their wives and children. Their social standing is enhanced by their control of household income and spending, their freedom of engaging in plural sexual relationships, and the primary access they have to household resources such as food and labour. Women seldom have the economic opportunity to earn as much as their husbands and thus often remain dependent on them. Their way of life is greatly determined by their husbands.

The economic and social dependence of women makes them vulnerable to material hardship in different ways. Men could refuse them shelter or money, the right to work or the right to education. In a non-physical way some men may degrade women by threats of physical violence, their absence from home when they are in a position to be home, and verbal abuse. Some women are not allowed to use contraceptives because their husbands fear it might encourage them to have extramarital affairs (Kotze & Van der Waal, 1995).

According to Kotze and Van der Waal (1995) husbands who work away from home often have affairs and this leads to neglect of their dependants. Other men in a village may also use the opportunity to have affairs with the neglected wives. A wife questioning the extramarital affairs of her husband is easily beaten, and she is also beaten if she engages in an affair herself, because this infringes on the husband's exclusive right to his wife's sexuality.

In the midst of rural poverty, women are often the most disadvantaged, because they depend on their husbands and their personal needs and well-being take a secondary role. This may have a negative impact on children since they are close to their mothers while their fathers are in urban areas for work. If a mother is not happy, she may fail to show her children affection and this may lead the children to develop a negative outlook on life in general.

The struggle for political freedom in South Africa has brought to the fore the emancipation of women. There are increased efforts to protect women and children against abuse and violence. The government also appears to be committed to empower women to take their



rightful positions in the family and the society. Today more and more women are given the opportunity to generate income for their families. Such women gain respect from their husbands and the community, but this usually happens if the woman enters some profession. According to Nielsen (1987) employed mothers generally have higher self-esteem and are more satisfied with their lives than housewives. Nielsen also states that employed mothers are able to create more satisfying relationships with their children than full-time housewives who feel personally frustrated with their lives.

## **2.4 PERSPECTIVES ON ADOLESCENCE**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

Since this study deals with adolescent boys and girls, it is necessary to review relevant literature on this developmental stage. Adolescence is the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood. From a legal point of view, adolescence ends when the individual becomes eligible to vote (age 18) or does military service (from age 16), when he no longer needs parental permission (age 21), or when he can be held liable for contractual obligations (age 21) (Louw, 1991).

From a psychological point of view, adolescence ends when the individual is reasonably certain of his identity, is emotionally independent of his parents, has developed his own value system and is capable of establishing adult love relationships and adult friendships. The individual has to comply with certain cultural prescribed norms before he may be considered as having left adolescence and as having entered adulthood (Louw, 1991). These norms differ from community to community and could include, for example, passing through a traditional initiation school, and physical maturation such as the occurrence of menstruation in girls.

### **2.4.2 Theoretical perspectives on adolescence**

Hall (in Lloyd, 1985) refers to adolescence as a time of "storm and stress". He suggests that adolescence is necessarily a period of emotional upheaval and turmoil because of the conflicts between the biologically determined, physical changes of puberty on the one hand, and society's demands on the adolescent to attain social and emotional maturity on the other hand.

Freud (in Lloyd, 1985) termed adolescence the genital stage, where the libido is invested in the genitals, and sexual gratification serves to reproduce the species. According to him, this stage is also characterised by the reawakening of the Oedipal/Electra conflict. This conflict concerns the usually unconscious sexual attraction of the child to the opposite sex parent (Oedipal attraction of a boy to his mother and Electra attraction of a girl to her father). When this conflict reappears, the adolescent becomes rebellious against his or her parents and other authority figures. The successful resolution of this conflict results in identification of the child with the parent of the same sex, thus ensuring the appropriate sex role identification (Lloyd, 1985).

Sullivan (1953) identified three stages of adolescence. The first stage is preadolescence, which is characterised by an intense close relationship with a peer of the same sex, during which intimacies are shared and this facilitates a movement from self-centredness to more mature feelings of love. The second stage is early adolescence, which is characterised by conflicting needs for personal security, interpersonal intimacy and lustful satisfaction. The third stage is late adolescence, which is characterised by a variety of sophisticated interpersonal relationships and the establishment of an emotionally and sexually intimate relationship with a special person.

Bandura (in Lloyd, 1985) describes an adolescent as a child-adult who observes other people as models for his actions. As the children grow up, their parents serve as models, as do siblings, teachers and other persons who are important to them. The process of learning is continuous, and current behaviour is a product of both past social experiences and present social environmental conditions (Lloyd, 1985).

According to Marcia (in Lloyd, 1985), the sense of identity which develops during adolescence means that an adolescent has made commitments to a vocational goal, and to a political and personal ideology. She describes four statuses that the adolescent may encounter in achieving identity:



### **(a) Identity foreclosure**

The adolescent in the foreclosure status has unquestioningly accepted and adopted the expectations of significant others, rather than going through the process of questioning and evolving his or her own beliefs and vocational choices.

### **(b) Identity moratorium**

In this status, the adolescent engages in a variety of identity experiments, trying on different roles, beliefs and behaviour as part of the process of evolving a personally satisfying identity. Most adolescents move on to the identity achievement status, but some drift into the status of identity diffusion.

### **(c) Identity diffusion**

This is characterised by a failure to achieve a stable and integrated sense of self. Youth in this status experience considerable self doubts, but don't appear to be concerned about doing anything to change their circumstances.

### **(d) Identity achievement**

In this status the adolescent has successfully resolved the identity crisis and is able to make a commitment to a vocation, and to a political and personal ideology.

Marcia (in Lloyd, 1985) states that both identity achievement and identity foreclosure constitute a resolution of the identity crisis, while identity diffusion does not lead to a solution of the identity crisis. Identity moratorium is a trial and error status, from where the child may move to achievement or drift into identity diffusion.

A negative identity according to Marcia (in Lloyd, 1985), refers to a self-concept that is opposite to dominant parental and societal values. A negative identity evolves because there has been too little support from the parents or society for a child to enable him or her to achieve a healthy sense of identity.

In Erickson's (in Louw, 1991) view, development takes place through eight stages, which are characterised by developmental tasks and crises. Each of the stages has two opposing poles. The solution of each stage does not lie simply in choosing the positive pole but rather in a synthesis of the two opposing poles. When the crisis of one stage has been successfully resolved, this facilitates the solution of the next crisis (Louw, 1991). Relevant to this study, is the stage of identity versus role confusion, and this is discussed next:

According to Erikson (in Louw, 1991), an adolescent needs to solve the crisis of this stage by developing a sense of identity, otherwise role confusion will be experienced. The sense of identity consists of three elements, namely the individual's certainty about his own ability, certainty about his own values and ideas, and certainty about his social and personal identity (Louw, 1991). In order to solve this identity crisis, the adolescent is likely to experiment with various possibilities, which could include smoking and drinking, sexual intercourse, stealing, conformity, etc. The peer group and the extent to which the child has parental support influence these experimentations.

### **2.4.3 Needs related to self-esteem during adolescence**

Jones (1985) points out that if one wants to understand adolescents' behaviour, it is important to realise that their needs are in many ways similar to those experienced by adults, but that adolescents respond more intensely to certain issues and are subjected to a somewhat different set of social expectations and variables. Cooperman (in Jones, 1985) identifies the following needs as important factors in developing self-esteem:

#### **(a) Need to experience a sense of significance**

Maslow posits that there are several needs that must be met before an individual can function effectively in the environment. He asserts that until these needs are met, an individual will not be able to move in the direction of growth and learning. Two of the needs identified by Maslow relate directly to adolescents' need to experience a sense of significance, namely to experience feelings of love and belonging, and the need to receive respect from significant others.



### **(b) Need to experience a sense of competence**

Erickson postulates that the major developmental issue just prior to adolescence (industry versus inferiority) is centred around establishing a feeling of success or competence related to tasks that the society defines as valuable. He suggests that failure to successfully resolve this developmental issue creates a sense of inferiority that could have a lasting impact upon the child and this could thus carry over into adolescence.

### **(c) Need to experience a sense of control**

The adolescent's experience of a sense of control (or power) is related to his or her cognitive development. Piaget noted that adolescence is characterised by a major change in cognitive functioning, through the development of formal operational thinking. While major differences exist in the rate at which individuals develop formal operational thinking, most adolescents develop the ability to understand and manipulate abstract conceptual issues. This new skill significantly enhances adolescents' potential for understanding and gaining control over their environment.

## **2.4.4 Social factors which influence adolescents' behaviour**

Parents, the peer group and the school influence adolescents' behaviour. This is discussed in the following paragraphs.

One of the developmental tasks of adolescents is to establish emotional and financial independence from their parents. To gain an independent identity and values of their own, it is likely that conflicts would arise between them and their parents. These conflicts may occur about issues such as sexual behaviour, drinking, drug use, family responsibilities, study habits, choice of friends and dating partners. The conflicts may indicate that the parents are concerned about their children, and the manner in which they are resolved may help the adolescent to reach autonomy with confidence. It is, however, also possible that deviant behaviour may develop if the conflicts are not adequately dealt with (Lloyd, 1985).

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, the peer group provides a sense of belonging during a phase in which youths have left the childhood culture behind, but have not yet assumed the values, interests and standards of the adult world. However, it is also possible that peers may influence an adolescent do things that are not acceptable to the community, such as taking drugs and alcohol or getting involved in gangs. Both parents need to be there to help the child deal with such situations (Lloyd, 1985).

In addition to providing formal education, schools also provide a physical environment in which adolescents spend a lot of their time, and which is the centre of the peer culture. The parents also play a role in the education of their children, by helping them with homework, paying school fees and motivating their children to engage in educational activities (Lloyd, 1985).

## 2.5 THE ROLE OF THE FATHER IN THE FAMILY

One of the most important roles of the father in a family is to establish the family's socio-economic status. Socio-economic status, in turn, has been documented to have a decisive impact on a range of critical events in child development, including children's intellectual development, the occurrence of emotional and behavioural problems, formation of friendships, gender role development and the provision of educational opportunities (Berman & Pederson, 1987).

The extent to which a father is solely responsible for establishing a family's socio-economic status has been affected by the increasing numbers of women who are now working, some of whom are highly educated and earn a good income. However, the extent to which this occurs depends on various factors, including cultural perceptions of gender roles and the access women have to educational opportunities. In the area where the present study was conducted, the families are predominantly dependent on the income generated by the fathers and few women are engaged in economically gainful activity.



Berman and Pederson (1987) state that both the mother and father play an important role in child rearing. Mothers generally interact at a higher rate with their children than fathers do, especially in providing greater amounts of verbal stimulation and care of toddlers, while fathers are more involved in physically arousing activities. Lamb and Sagi (1983) also found that fathers spend proportionally more time engaging in physical activities with their children than mothers do. However, fathers may fulfil the same role as primary caregiver for a neonate as a mother would, which includes, for example, holding, kissing, looking at the child, exploring with him or her, and vocalising to the neonate.

Birns and Hay (1988) point out that the loving care of a father enhances family life, it makes motherhood less stressful and perhaps fosters nurturance in the mother, and promotes attachment of children to their fathers.

In view of the foregoing, it is evident that the role of the father in the family goes further than only putting bread on the table, but includes providing children with emotional warmth, affection, understanding, and security. These are the elements that children interpret as love and concern. If the father pays attention to his children and becomes actively involved in their lives, it will be easier for them to internalise social control structures represented by the father, which is important in the development of the conscience.

Lamb and Sagi (1983) mention the following developmental areas of the child that are usually influenced by the father:

**(a) Gender role identification**

Both boys and girls have been shown to be influenced by the fathers' behaviour and attitudes. Powerful and nurturing fathers are frequently modelled or imitated by their sons who in turn develop a masculine gender role.

Fathers also differentially reinforce appropriate sex-typed behaviour in girls. A father who responds to his daughter as an interested male would respond to a female, appears to have the greater impact, by teaching his daughter the female role and female sex-type behaviour.

### **(b) Cognitive development**

Nurturing fathers are modelled by their sons who internalise their modes of thinking and problem solving. The father's interest in his children's academic success may also exert a positive influence on the intellectual development of the child.

### **(c) Social competence**

Children whose fathers are involved and nurturing have been found to be better adjusted and more socially competent. It has also been found that males who were assessed as having achieved successful emotional and interpersonal adjustment in adulthood, were likely to have had highly involved fathers. Generally assertive, independent behaviour in daughters is associated with firmness and demands for mature behaviour from both mothers and fathers.

## **2.6 REASONS FOR FATHER ABSENCE**

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

Adams, Milner and Schrepf (1984) and Mahabeer (1989) postulate that the father may be absent in the family due to death, divorce, separation, desertion, teenage pregnancy, and unwed motherhood.

### **2.6.2 Desertion and separation**

Desertion occurs when one partner walks out from the family without notice. It may be due to conflict, financial reasons, or other obligations a spouse does not want to face. Other examples of reasons for desertion are infertility, spouses losing interest in one another, or an unplanned pregnancy (Brisbane & Riker, 1984).

As discussed above, one characteristic of rural life in black society in South Africa, is that fathers often work as migrant labourers. This results not only in them being absent from home for certain periods, but some of them also become estranged from their families in rural areas.

Desertion must be distinguished from separation. The latter is when one spouse moves out with notice, and it may be regarded as a cooling off period, which could make it possible for some couples to come together again later (Brisbane & Riker, 1984).

### **2.6.3 Divorce**

Divorce refers to the process whereby a marriage is ended legally (Brisbane & Riker, 1984). There are various facets of divorce, and this is discussed next:

#### **2.6.3.1 Facets of divorce**

Potgieter (1986) mentions the following dimensions of divorce:

##### **(a) Emotional divorce**

This is a situation where a chain of events leads to divorce. Deterioration in the marriage often results from a lack of positive emotional contact between husband and wife. For example, a relationship which is over-critical and negative on the side of one partner, may induce the other partner to want to leave the family.

##### **(b) Legal divorce**

This is a process where divorce is seen as a culmination of legal procedures, including determining child custody, maintenance of the child, and visitation arrangements. It is also the legal means of making the individual parties re-marriageable.



### **(c) Economic divorce**

This arises because the married couple forms a property owning unit in society, and divorce or separation forces a division of this property, depending on the pre-marital contractual agreement.

### **(d) Co-parental divorce**

In this kind of divorce the parents need to make certain decisions regarding their children when getting divorced. The parents' views regarding the best interests of the children may not be in harmony with one another and this may lead to conflict.

### **(e) Community divorce**

This implies giving up the community to which the spouses have been accustomed to, which could include, for example, friends, acquaintances and family members. Breaking links with these people could lead to feelings of loneliness.

### **(f) Psychic divorce**

This implies that the individual has to learn to become self-supporting and be able to take charge of his or her own life.

## **2.6.3.2 Reasons for divorce**

Price and Mckenry (1988) mention the following reasons for divorce: a couple that is not mutually supportive, excessive drinking, excessive gambling, authoritarianism and infertility.

Ambrose, Harper and Pemberton (1983) state the following reasons for a marriage break-up: extramarital affairs, an impossible and incompatibility relationship, serious sexual problems, poor communication, lack of understanding, the wife or husband meets or wishes to marry someone else, problems over money, a wife's affinity to her mother, unreasonable jealousy,



unresolved complaints, a wife wishing to work, very different backgrounds, violence by a husband, children or wife, and expectations not fulfilled.

Adams, Milner and Schrepf (1984) and Brisbane and Riker (1984) give the following reasons of divorce:

*Pregnancy:* premarital pregnancy often leads to early marriage and the earlier the marriage, the higher the rate of marital instability.

*Labour force participation by women:* working mothers may believe that they can handle the family alone, so instead of solving marital problems, they prefer divorce.

*Low socio-economic status:* couples with low incomes are more likely to see their marriages fail. However, this may differ from community to community and it is possible that in certain communities, divorce occurs more frequently amongst educated people, celebrities and successful business people, than amongst people from low income groups.

Louw (1991) states the following reasons for divorce:

*Age of marriage:* Marriage between adolescents is seen as a high-risk marriage because so many of them end up in divorce. The major reason for this is that one or both of the partners have not yet achieved the psychological maturity necessary for successful marriage. Young people's marriages are also often plagued by financial difficulties, which could put strain on their relationship.

*Parental example:* If the parents' marriage is successful, it provides a positive model for children regarding mutual support, acceptance and solving problems. However, it is still possible that some people do not just do what their parents do, because human life is not lawful and a child can perceive the world differently from his/her parents.

*Difference in tempo and nature of development:* Differences between marriage partners in psychological development may be so great, that their lives become incompatible.

### 2.6.3.3 The effects of divorce on adolescents

According to Nielsen (1987), divorce does not affect all adolescents in a similar fashion, but certain factors appear to be fairly common. After a divorce, adolescents are usually confronted with new economic issues. Because the family's income is most likely to decline after a divorce, many adolescents resent their parents for depriving them of the material possessions they could otherwise have afforded. Vacations, clothes, records, and other gifts may become luxuries that parents can no longer provide.

The poverty which could result when the parents are divorced or when the father is absent for other reasons, may have various effects on adolescents. Adolescents living in poverty-stricken families are less likely to succeed in school, and to fully develop their mental abilities. They are likely to get married earlier and less likely to limit the size of their future families (Nielsen, 1987).

Other areas of a child's development may also be affected by divorce. The absence of a father might deprive children of a male role model. Supervision and discipline of the children may become problematic if the mother has to work to provide for the family. The mother may also become involved with another man, and the child's relationship with the newcomer may create problems.

### 2.6.4 Unwed mothers

The absence of a father from a family, may also be the result of a woman deciding not to marry the father of her child (or children). Prater (1995) reports that one of the reasons to remain single, include whether it is regarded as socially acceptable to remain unmarried; this depends on the values of a particular community. Other reasons for remaining single according to Prater (1995) include a boyfriends' unwillingness to marry, and the girl's own belief that she is too young to get married.

## **2.6.5 Teenage pregnancies**

According to Adams *et al.* (1984) and Mahabeer (1989) the reasons for fathers being absent in their families include teenage pregnancies. The factors that contribute to teenage pregnancies are discussed next:

### **2.6.5.1 Psychological factors**

Young women with low ego-strength and a negative self-concept may use sexual activity as a means of acting out strong sexual impulses. Also, highly dependent girls with strong needs for affection, those who feel they have little control over what happens to them, and those who experience social or psychological stress, are more likely to become pregnant (Mckenry, in Lloyd, 1985).

### **2.6.5.2 Physiological factors**

Early onset of menarche and better general health in affluent societies have increased the potential for pregnancy among young girls (Mckenry, in Lloyd, 1985).

### **2.6.5.3 Socio-economic factors**

According to Richter-Strydom (cited in Psychological Association of South Africa, 1989), socio-economic factors influence the occurrence of teenage pregnancies and these factors include the effects of poverty, urbanisation, and the migrant labour system. Pregnant schoolgirls tend to come from families of lower socio-economic status and families which are less cohesive and organised. Poverty as such, however, is not a cause of pregnancy, but it is related to its frequency rates since those who are poor have fewer economic, social, and medical resource for preventing unwanted pregnancies. Teenagers who fall pregnant are also more likely to come from families with less frequent church attendance and from one-parent families with the mother as head. The peer group also plays a role in teenage pregnancies, in that friends may influence each other not to fall pregnant.



#### **2.6.5.4 Cognitive factors**

Ignorance about sexual activity and about the use of contraceptives, is a major cause of unwanted teenage pregnancies. Freeman and Rickels (1993) found that there is a disinclination among both black and white adolescents to use contraceptives, with the faulty reason that they don't think they will get pregnant. A related reason for teenage pregnancies could be that teenagers may lack the ability to plan ahead or anticipate the future. It has also been found that pregnant teenagers do not lack intelligence, but lack the ability to analyse abstract issues realistically (Kreipe, Roghmann, & McAnarney, in Freeman & Rickels, 1993). Freeman and Rickels (1993) conclude that teenagers may risk pregnancy not because of any form of pathology, moral or otherwise, but because of normal factors of adolescent development.

#### **2.6.5.5 Single mothers**

Single parenting encourages early childbearing by reducing social control and increasing an opportunity for engaging in irresponsible sexual activities. The single parent may also encourage sexual activity by acting as a role model. For instance, a single mother who is dating or cohabiting, sends a message to teenage daughters that sex outside marriage is acceptable and perhaps even preferable (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

### **2.7 THE IMPACT OF FATHER ABSENCE ON THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN**

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, changes in roles or in a setting, or both, bring about an alteration in a person's position in the ecological environment. The adjustment of a child as a result of father absence may be called an ecological transition, since in such instances there will be a change in roles and the setting itself. The developing child needs the presence and participation of other parties such as parents, relatives, friends and neighbours to deal with the environment effectively (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the absence of the father, the child loses the participation of the father in his/her development.

Father absence may affect a child morally, emotionally, and psychologically. It is also likely to deprive children of some of the most important resources in life.

## **2.7.1 Loss of resources**

### **2.7.1.1 Loss of economic resources**

#### **(a) Child support system**

Mclanahan and Sandefur (1994) posit that the child support systems established in many countries do a poor job of collecting child support funds from uncooperative fathers. These authors argue that some fathers do not pay child support funds because they are unable to monitor and control how the money is spent, suspecting that the money is used to help other members of the household rather than the child itself.

#### **(b) Standard of living**

Mclanahan and Sandefur (1994), Lamb (in Ears, 1989) and Everett (1994) argue that economic loss in the family, as a result of parents living apart, lowers a child's standard of living, because the total family income is not distributed equally. A mother and her children usually receive less than half the total family income even though their household may consist of more people, whereas the father usually receives more than half of the total income alone.

However, Mahabeer (1989) contends that financial problems in instances of single parenting may be due to low socio-economic status and not necessarily due to father absence only. It is also stated that low-income mothers tend to make more demands on their children to care for themselves and to obey their mothers.

#### **(c) Academic achievement**

The loss of economic resources may impact on the child's academic achievement. It may lead to the child attending a school of lower quality. The single parent may also fail

to pay for lessons after school, or may not have money to enable children to go on camps or trips. These extracurricular activities do not only improve the children's skills, but also provide general intellectual stimulation which affects learning (Mclanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Mahabeer (1989) states that adolescent girls who experienced father absence during the stage when the Oedipal complex had to be resolved, showed a higher rate of academic problems and exhibited aggressive behaviour towards their parents and peers.

### 2.7.1.2 The loss of parental resources

#### (a) Attachment between father and child

Mclanahan and Sandefur (1994) state 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 the father.

#### 2.7.1.3 Loss of economic resources

##### (a) Job/economic status

Mclanahan and Sandefur (1994) assert that changes in financial income of a father is related to loss of job/economic status. Families with low income can afford to live in communities with better facilities, and job loss or unemployment usually reduces income it may also restrict single parent families to live in areas where there are fewer resources.



## **(b) Care**

According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), most single mothers are forced to fulfil paternal and maternal roles simultaneously, without receiving adequate support. Some experience high levels of stress and become anxious and depressed. This can lead to inconsistent parenting, which makes it difficult to provide the kind of discipline that is coupled with affection to their children.

## **(c) Gender role identification**

Ears (1989) reports that father absence may have a detrimental impact on the development of masculinity in sons, since there is no role model for sons to identify with. However, it is also possible that these children may use other male figures within or outside the family as their role models.

Lamb and Sagi (1983) state that in the absence of a father, boys may act in a masculine way in some facets of their behaviour, while behaving in unmasculine or in feminine ways in other situations, which may indicate identity confusion. Girls who do not have the opportunity to observe their mothers interacting with their fathers, may not learn how a wife is supposed to relate to her husband; this could play a role in rejecting the role of being a wife or a mother, and they may feel insecure in their basic femininity. However, some girls may also learn from their mothers, that it is very difficult to live without a husband and try by all means to ensure a stable marriage for themselves.

### **2.7.1.3 Loss of community resources**

#### **(a) Socio-economic status**

McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) assert that changes in financial income due to the absence of a father is related to loss of socio-economic status. Families with a higher income can afford to live in communities with better facilities, and since single-parenthood usually reduces income it may also restrict single parent families to places where there are fewer resources.

A lack of community resources is likely to weaken a child's connection with the labour force. Children who live in poor communities where many adults are jobless, and depend on welfare grants, have less information about how to find a job, and are less likely to find a job than children who live in prosperous communities.

#### **(b) Residential instability**

Children of divorced or separated parents more frequently change residence than children from intact families. In part this is due to changes 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 the mother remarries or when a boyfriend or a relative such as a grandmother moves in, more space is needed and the family may move again (Mclanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

#### **(c) Friends and relatives**

Divorce or separation also reduces children's connection to their community. When a family lives in a community for a long time, it usually develops close ties with friends and relatives, who provide them with social support. When a family moves from town to town, these ties are undermined and often destroyed by losing old friends and neighbours (Mclanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

#### **(d) Knowledge about community resources**

If the family has to move after a separation or divorce, the children do not have knowledge about the resources such as libraries and youth clubs, in their new area of residence. They are thus unlikely to make use of these facilities and opportunities (Mclanahan & Sandefur, 1994). This in turn could affect their development negatively.

## **2.7.2 Interpersonal adjustment**

### **2.7.2.1 Pro-social goal setting**

The developing child has to establish goals which are not only self-centred, but which also take the interests of others into consideration, because a person is a social being and needs to be flexible in order to maintain good relationship with other people. Goal attainment does not exist in a vacuum, but occurs through the process of socialisation. Family, peer group, schools and religious institutions help to determine the type of goals an individual develops. If a child is neglected or abandoned by a parent, he or she may establish selfish goals which do not take the interests of others into account, and this may cause failure to maintain good relationships with others (Mruk, 1995).

### **2.7.2.2 Adjustment in terms of gender**

In the research of Hetherington (in Lamb & Sagi, 1983), boys showed more depression and fewer indications of accepting divorce than girls did. However, this does not mean that girls are not affected. Hetherington (in Ears, 1989) states that adolescent girls who do not have fathers, display significant difficulty in their interaction with males and have more attention-seeking behaviour. This, of course, does not apply to all girls from divorced families. There are differences depending on the individual, and there are girls who form adequate relationships with males, and who later have happy marriages of their own.

Billar (1993) states that inadequately fathered children, particularly boys, tend to be less popular and have less satisfying peer relationships. They may also have difficulty in relating to other males. Hetherington (in Lamb & Sagi, 1983) found that boys became more isolated from their male peers, and preferred to play with young children and girls. The reason could be that they felt inadequate when associating with their own age group, and felt more at ease with younger children and girls. However, there are individual variations and some boys relate well with their peers and get a lot of support from their friends.



### 2.7.2.3 Social isolation

Lamb (in Ears, 1989) contends that divorced families experience social isolation, not only because of disapproval of divorce, but also because of social exclusion from a social system in which families and couples are often treated as the elementary unit.

### 2.7.3 Motivation and future expectations

The loss of resources due to father absence affects children's willingness to invest in themselves, by lowering their expectations and motivation. The youth who do not expect to continue with tertiary education due to a lack of funds, even though they may have the ability, are less motivated to work hard in high school than youngsters who expect to go to college (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

However, children who are under the care of both parents may also experience feelings of low self-esteem and a poor self-image, and have low motivation to continue with their education. Family environments characterised by tension, hostility and emotional abuse are not conducive to produce children who are stable and have a positive outlook on life.

Living in a single-parent family may also affect a young woman's assessment of the implications of early childbearing. A teenager who does not expect to go to college or to have an interesting job, is much less motivated to avoid a pregnancy than a young woman who has many opportunities and who expects to pursue a career (Adams, Milner & Schrepf, 1984).

Goetting (in Ears, 1989) reports that daughters of divorced parents married younger and that a large number of them were pregnant at the time of marriage. It is also noted that husbands of daughters of divorced parents were less educated, had less stable employment, and were more frequently involved in problems with the law.

The deprivation of basic needs does not necessarily affect the child's long-term expectations negatively. According to Maslow (1970), needs are arranged hierarchically from lower level needs (e.g., physiological and safety needs) to higher level needs (e.g., the needs for affection and self-actualisation). Lower level needs must be satisfied before one can move to the next

and higher level of needs. However, it is possible for someone to postpone fulfilment of some of the lower level needs and satisfy higher needs first. For instance, a person may stay in a shack or a shabby rented room while getting tertiary education first, so that he could be able to buy a better house once he has finished his studies and has a job. Such a person is actually fulfilling the need for self-actualisation, before satisfying the lower level need for adequate shelter.

#### 2.7.4 Morality

According to Freud (Louw, 1991), moral development is based on superego strength. The superego refers to the rules, values and norms governing behaviour, which are imposed by society, friends, parents and other people. The superego forms the basis of the capacity to feel guilty. If one fails to develop this capacity adequately, one is inclined not to readily feel guilty and as a result a person may behave in ways that are detrimental to others. In an extreme form this could give rise to an antisocial personality (Louw, 1991). In some cultures the father is the one who maintains rules in the family, so in his absence, the development of a conscience may be impaired.

The occurrence of delinquent behaviour is related to the moral development of adolescents. Ears (1989) states that divorce could contribute to children becoming delinquent, psychologically disturbed, and low achievers. However, not all children from single parents are delinquent, some become important figures in the community.

Biller (1993) mentions the following anti-social behaviour in father absent children, both boys and girls: lashing out at others because of frustration at not being able to keep up with classmates at school, boys' physical aggression, and girls' sexual promiscuity. These are symptoms of a poor self-image and psychological problems.

In the community where the research was conducted, it is morally disapproved if girls do not form stable heterosexual relationships, and frequently change partners. Biller (1993) argues that father absence can greatly interfere with a daughter's interpersonal and sexual adjustment, some girls become obsessed with heterosexual relationships as they desperately seek some form of male affection to substitute for what they lack in a relationship with their



father. Mahabeer (1989) also found that adolescent daughters of divorced families show greater receptiveness to males and reported earlier and more frequent dating and sexual intercourse. Others may idealise absent fathers and spend their lives in a futile search for a male who fits their unrealistic fantasy (Biller, 1993).

Moral development is influenced by discipline in the family. Lamb and Sagi (1983) contend that, due to multiple responsibilities of the mother after the father has left the family, the mother could fail to supervise her children properly. Bedtime and mealtimes were reported to be erratic, the children arrived late at home, and household tasks were often left undone. The sons of divorced mothers were more aggressive, resistant, and negative than daughters, and mothers directed more negative sanctions and fewer positive behaviour towards sons than toward their daughters.

### **2.7.5 Self-concept**

Mruk (1995) states that various factors, including unsupportive parents and socio-economic deprivation, can affect the early development of worthfulness and competence in children. Hetherington (in Ears, 1989) found that adolescent girls who lost their fathers through divorce and death have a negative self-concept and are more insecure. Related to this, Adams, Milner and Schrepf (in Potgieter, 1986) also found that children with an absent father lack positive self-esteem. According to Biller (1993) derogatory comments about father absence can contribute to the development of a poor self-concept and maladaptive behaviour in a child. This may be due to feelings of shame. Wallerstein (in Ears, 1989) found that children report acute shame about divorce or disruption in the family, and the behaviour of their parents.

Dominian (in Gunard, 1982) claims that a child from a divorced family may believe that he is no longer acceptable to others. If the child's 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 rejected by men.

The effect of father absence on self-esteem can partly be explained with reference to Maslow's (1970) theory. A child who hungers for affectionate relationships, and for recognition by his group or family, is likely to strive with great intensity to satisfy this goal. A child without a father



may not experience a sense of belonging and may not develop beyond this level of needs to attain positive self-esteem and self-actualisation. In accordance with Adler's theory these children feel inferior and to achieve a sense of superiority, they need support and encouragement, including support from their fathers (Mruk, 1995). According to Carl Rogers' (Louw, 1991) theory, healthy personality development could only occur when the child receives love and affirmation from significant others, so that he is able to attain self-actualisation. Without positive regard from other people, the child may not develop his full potential as a human being and this may negatively affect his psychological well-being (Louw, 1991). Wallerstein (in Ears, 1989) also states that children who feel rejection because of divorce or disruption in the family, may depict themselves as unlovable.

## **2.7.6 Emotional experiences**

### **2.7.6.1 Abandonment**

Wallerstein (in Ears, 1989) states that children experience divorce or disruption in the family as implied rejection of themselves by their fathers. Westman (in Gunard, 1982) found that infants are affected by their mother's reaction to divorce. If a mother is preoccupied with her troubled divorce and becomes depressed, she is unlikely to be able to meet the child's emotional needs, and as a consequence the child may feel he has lost both parents and his adjustment may become more difficult.

### **2.7.6.2 Anger and resentment**

Many children are angry when their parents separate, feeling betrayed and abandoned by their fathers. Mothers usually retain custody of the children, and the fathers are thus often perceived as leaving the family and often anger is directed to the fathers (Holman, 1977; Kelly, in Gunard, 1982).

Ears (1989) found that some teenagers direct their anger towards their mothers for not being able to stop the father from leaving the family. Some adolescents get sullen and irritable and easily react with physical attack to whoever teases them. Rubin and Prince (in Gunard, 1982) found that some children become angry with their mothers for either causing the divorce or

driving the father away, and some children are afraid of antagonising or challenging their mothers.

Mahabeer (1989) emphasises the negative outcome of divorce on children's relationship with their parents. The custodial mother may displace the anger she feels towards her ex-husband onto her children. For instance the mother may respond to a child who is asking for money by saying, "where do you expect me to get money while you know your father left home".

According to Westman (in Gunard, 1982) a child, especially a boy, could be the recipient of the mother's resentment towards the father and this may result in child abuse or a weakening of the bond between the mother and the infant. The child's presence may remind the mother of the bad and irresponsible father who left them, and she might end up directing her frustration onto the child. This can interfere with the child's later development.

#### **2.7.6.3 Fear of marriage failure**

Ears (1989) found that children raised by their mothers after divorce are outspoken about not getting married for fear of repeating the mistakes of their parents; they seem to have a pervasive fear of marriage failure which may serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

#### **2.7.6.4 Guilt feelings**

Wilkson (in Ears, 1989) states that some children perceive desertion by a parent as a departure from them personally, and they may blame themselves for the failure of their parent's marriage. Glardner (in Gunard, 1982) reports that children may not understand why their fathers left the family and may then believe that their fathers left them as punishment for some bad deed they had committed.

#### **2.7.7 Positive experiences in the context of father absence**

Even though many researches describe negative life experiences of children in the absence of the father, one cannot underestimate the inherent human capability of handling a difficult environment in a productive manner. This is what Victor Frankl calls the power of the human



spirit and its capability to survive under the difficult conditions. Human beings can search for purpose in life and reasons to live in the midst of negative experiences (Ivey, Ivey & Morgan, 1997).

Not all children are affected negatively by father absence. Some may continue to show positive self-esteem and self-motivation, they may feel challenged by their environment, and continue to do well and progress well in life, like children having both parents. Magrab (in Price & Mckenry, 1988) states that even though divorce creates a sense of loss to children, these children do not differ radically from the children who have both parents, because the majority of them are healthy and normal. In some children, divorce accelerates the maturation process because the children become more realistic, futuristic and independent than their peers. Thus, some children seem to be empowered by divorce, and they do well in life regardless of what happened to them.

Manosevits (in Ears, 1989) contends that not all children whose fathers are in the family experience physical and psychological well-being. Men who have hostile and rejecting relationships towards members of their families do not facilitate the psychological maturation of their children and emotional damage to children may occur. In such instances, the dissolution of the families by divorce would more likely benefit than harm the children. Divorce might be beneficial in the long run since it would permit a woman to remarry, if she so wishes, thereby possibly providing the children with a more accessible and suitable father figure.

Mclanahan and Sandefur (1994) state that the presence of two parents in a family promotes responsible parenting, and protects the children from possible parental neglect and sometimes also from abuse. But not all nuclear families promote responsible parenting. Some parents are unable to co-operate in raising their children, and sometimes they just do not care whether or not they are doing a good job. In such cases parenting is likely to be poor and authority is likely to be weak.

Jauch (in Mahabeer, 1989) points out that extended families play an important role by providing emotional support and practical assistance to the whole family and this may compensate for the absence of a father. The support by the extended family may also mitigate the negative social stigma which may be associated with single parenting.



## **2.8 CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE SELECTED POPULATION**

The researcher conducted interviews with members of the community to gather the information reported in the following paragraphs. She also grew up and still lives in the same community and this provided many opportunities to gather information through participant observation. The information which is given here, includes views about marriage, traditional ways of birth control, unwed and single mothers, views about the roles of men and women, views about children, the discipline of children, education and communalism.

### **2.8.1 Marriage**

#### **2.8.1.1 The process of marriage**

The traditional African marriage is a process whereby a male person sends senior members of his family to pay lobola (in the form of money or cattle) to the parents of the woman he intends marrying. After that a traditional celebration is held, which includes slaughtering a cow, making traditional beer and inviting friends and relatives to share in the celebration. The celebration is meant to please the ancestors, so that the couple will stay together in peace. Those who fail to make such a celebration, for example because of financial problems, are still regarded as married couples, but they must make sure they arrange a celebration at a later stage since they still owe it to the ancestors. If divorce or separation occurs before the marriage celebrations could be arranged, it is believed to be punishment from the ancestors. If a woman dies before the marriage celebrations, her husband's family slaughters a goat or cow before her burial, believing that it establishes a path to the land of her in-laws' ancestors. If this is not done, her own family takes her home to be buried there.

In some communities the family of the groom pays lobola and buys food, clothes, etc. for the celebration. But in other communities, the groom's parents just pay lobola and each family arranges its own celebration.

However, in contemporary society, not all people strictly adhere to the above cultural practices, and they do whatever they regard as suitable for themselves.

There is no specific age for young people to get married. Girls are considered to be ready for marriage when they reach physical maturation, and it is expected that boys should be employed before they marry. If a boy does not work, his parents may still organise money to pay lobola for him, if they feel it is the right time for him to get a wife.

Traditionally, both a boy or a girl must have been from the initiation school before they could even think of marriage, but since no culture is static and due to the influence of the Christian religion, that is no longer a precondition.

### 2.8.1.2 Types of marriages

There are different types of marriages in traditional African society. These are described next:

#### (a) Arranged marriages

Traditionally marriages were arranged between relatives. For instance, a man would marry a *malome's* (mother's brother) or a *rakgadi's* (father's older sister) daughter. The parents made this decision, and the person concerned was not allowed to reject his/her parents' choice. However, nowadays the parents seldom choose marriage partners for their children, but they do advise them about a good or bad partner.

#### (b) Polygamy

Polygamy is accepted in the community where this study was done. Men are allowed to marry more than one wife, irrespective of whether they are able to maintain their families or not. Sometimes a man marries another wife to punish his first wife for the mistakes she has committed. It is called *mosadi wa go hloka maitshwaro o a nyatšwa*, which means to degrade or devalue the first wife who did something wrong. Instead of returning her to her home, she is required to remain a member of the family, but sharing her husband with a new wife. Parents usually do not want their sons to divorce, but instead they encourage them to marry for the second time so that all children should have a father. In some cases, the children of the first wife lack emotional and financial support from the side of their father, because by making them happy would imply that



their mother is also happy. This, however, does not apply to all instances of polygamy. Some men marry many wives because they have money and are capable to look after them. In such cases, the father usually gives all his children what they need for survival, even though it is not a good experience for the first wife when her husband marries another woman.

### **(c) *Go nyalwa ke lapa***

*Go nyalwa ke lapa* is another kind of marriage which exists in the community. This is the process whereby a woman whose chances of getting married to a male person are over, gets married to an old couple or a single granny who either does not have children, or whose children have moved out of the family. The woman must already have children and she is supposed to stay together with her children with the old couple or the granny, thus providing a sense of security and belonging to the children and their mother. In turn, the woman and her children do all the home chores for the family, such as washing their clothes, cooking for them and cleaning the house. The practice of *go nyalwa ke lapa* also enables the old couple to maintain and continue the existence of their surname (*go godiša sefane/leina*).

The old couple or granny may appoint a male relative to have children with the woman and to represent a father figure within the family. She may also be allowed to find somebody for herself, but the in-laws must not see him, because it shows a lack of respect. The children from the family of this nature are fatherless, but they are usually respected in the community like those whose fathers have passed away. They get respect, because their mother is married.

Conflicts may arise if the old couple do not give the woman money, or if they complain that she does not do her chores properly. If she has more children, they may also complain about the expenses they have to bear, for providing food and other matters to an additional family member.



### 2.8.1.3 Life after marriage

After marriage the bride leaves her family and stays with the in-laws. Staying with the in-laws is often an unpleasant experience. It is believed that a daughter-in-law must be treated badly by her in-laws to test her dedication and commitment to build a family. This is called *makoti o a kgothišwa* (the bride must be ill-treated). She has to cook and wash clothes for the whole family, collect firewood, draw water and weed the garden, whilst her sisters-in-law could help if they so wish. The young bride is expected to tolerate this, the main reason being to maintain the unity of the family and to provide the children with a sense of belonging and family stability.

A daughter-in-law who is obedient, submissive, and hard working is supported by her in-laws. For instance, they will take care of her together with her children when her husband does not carry out his responsibilities towards his family, such as when he stays in an urban area for a long time.

It is said *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*, which means the daughter-in-law must stay with her in-laws until she dies, no matter how unbearable the environment is. Her plight could include tolerating her husband having extramarital affairs, waiting for her husband if he has left the family without reason, and accepting that he supports her unmarried sisters-in-law financially. It is unacceptable for a woman to return to her home from the in-laws. The people in the community do not respect a woman who does not maintain her marriage, no matter how difficult her situation is.

If the man is the last born son, he and his wife and children are supposed to stay in his parents' home permanently. He is called *mojalefa*, and will inherit all his parents' possessions. After a period of time, other sons are allowed to establish their own home. A nuclear family consisting of only the couple and their children is thus encouraged, because it provides the children with enough space and privacy. It is said that it is easier to manage a small family than a big one. However, a nuclear family is still required to share whatever they have with the in-laws and the wife's parents. There are also instances where parents want a son and his wife to remain with them. This is not only to keep the family together, but also so that the son can continue to support his parents who may fear that if he were move out of his parents' home, he would not be able give them money like before.

### 2.8.1 Joint inheritance by sons and single mothers

If a husband dies, his younger brother takes over to look after his family and to provide them with a father figure. He becomes a surrogate father, and takes over the responsibilities left by his brother. However, if the younger brother is already married, this may cause hardship for his own family, in the sense that he may no longer be able to provide for his own family as he used to, or he may even leave his own family altogether.

A similar practice relates to women. If a married woman dies, her younger sister, who must be unmarried, replaces her. This is called *se ya ntlo*, which literally means that the sister goes to where there is already a house or a home, i.e., she does not have to establish a new home.

### 2.8.2 Indigenous ways of birth control

There are two traditional methods of birth control, but these are not reliable and girls who have fallen pregnant frequently claim that they have been using it. The methods are as follows: a girl must wet a cloth with her menstrual blood and give it to her granny. She then hides it in a place only known to her (usually underground). From there the girl is free to involve in sexual intercourse without falling pregnant. When she is ready to bear children, the granny then goes and takes the cloth, gives it to the girl and she must then throw it from the back to any place, after which she can now bear children. It is believed that if the granny forgets where she hid the cloth or if she dies, that girl will never bear children. Another method is that of a traditional healer giving a rope covered with muti to a girl to tie around her waist. When she wants to bear children, she unties the rope. The ineffectiveness of these practices may contribute to teenage pregnancies and multiple pregnancies.

The indigenous ways of birth control is also linked to religion. There are various religious denominations in the community, such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), the Apostolic Church, and other churches. The people in the community have the opportunity to follow the religion of their choice. Some churches like the ZCC do not allow women to use contraceptives. It is not acceptable to prevent the birth of a child, and this is not supposed to be argued, but simply accepted. If one were to disobey the law, God will punish you.



### 2.8.3 Unmarried women and single mothers

There is a belief that a woman must get married and belong to another clan. If she is not married, she carries the responsibility of whatever mistakes are committed by her children. If a child of a never-married or of a divorced parent commits mistakes, people say "it is not surprising, his mother is not married, where do we expect him to learn a good life".

Marriage is thus regarded as of great importance, and a woman must belong somewhere rather than in her parents' family. Although there are many difficulties within any marriage, a family is supposed to provide happiness, understanding, support, caring, and loyalty.

It is rare to find a woman having her own home (house) before or without marriage. If young, unmarried girls fall pregnant, they mostly stay with their parents and brothers (the uncles of their children). The parents play an important role in maintaining their unmarried daughters and grandchildren. If the brothers of the unmarried sisters are working, they help to raise their sisters' children, but problems may arise when a brother gets married. The wife of the brother will need money for her own family, while her sisters-in-law also need help. If the wife were to stop helping her sisters-in-law, they are likely to treat her badly, report her bad manners to her husband, and encourage their brother to leave that woman or marry a second wife.

The community where this study was done, have negative attitudes towards an unmarried mother and her children. For example, a man's parents may oppose their son marrying the daughter of a single mother, because she does not have a father. This in turn could create a cycle of single mothers born from single parent families. However, this is less likely to happen to boys, because they are the ones who propose marriage and are perceived as superior to girls.

Single mothers are a threat to married women in the community. If men fail to come home at the specified time, the wives may fear that their husbands could have been with a single woman. Married women thus often confront unmarried mothers, and this could affect the children of single mothers negatively, since they may observe their mothers being belittled, but without fully understanding why this happens.



## 2.8.4 Views about men and women

### 2.8.4.1 Men

Men are supposed to be assertive, decision makers, independent, financially responsible for the family and responsible for discipline in the family. Traditionally, men take control of everything in the family, such as the number of children, dressing style of his wife, the kind of furniture that is bought and the kind of house the family stays in. The community believes that a husband is bewitched, or is a coward, if he involves his wife in decision making.

Men are not allowed to punish their wives physically, but some men do so to solve family problems. It has been observed that physical punishment is often used by men who are unemployed and who are unable to satisfy the needs of their families and when they have to face their failures, they become aggressive. The researcher attended the traditional court several times, and observed the chief fining husbands who physically punish their wives. They pay with money, and the amount depends on the severity of the assault and the circumstances.

There are exceptions to the descriptions given above. Many men involve their wives in decision making. Some do not allow their wives to do difficult manual work. There are many women who are educated and working, and there are husbands who allow their wives, who are not educated, to find jobs around the village.

Many of the men in the area where the study was done, work in urban areas while their children and wives remain in the rural areas. Some husbands come home at the end of every month, others fortnightly or weekly. This seems not to be a problem to the women. What is important, is to see their husbands coming home at the specified time, even though they may suspect that the men may have other women in the cities. It is accepted that men will have extramarital relationships and this is regarded as indicating good manhood.

In contemporary times, living far from their families while working in the cities is not because the men are not allowed to bring their wives and children along, but because it has become

part of a life-style. A rural home is believed to be secure, because urban areas are seen as a place for work and not home.

In the area where the researcher comes from, men who are considerate buy clothes for their families at the places where they work. Normally, the family members have no choice with regard to the type and size of clothes, the father would just buy it and they are expected to appreciate it. Some of the clothes may be too big for the children, but they are supposed to wear it like that, as they will 'grow up with them'. A reason for this is that blacks often earn meagre salaries and in addition, clothing stores are often not available in rural villages and it is not easy for a father to come home and take his children to town to buy them clothes which they could try on first. Thus, the parent buys the clothes in the town or city where he works.

#### **2.8.4.2 Women**

In the rural area where this study was conducted, women are supposed to be loyal, tolerant, submissive, and dependent childbearing housewives.

A woman is supposed to remain loyal to her husband. Even if he may be absent for twenty years or more, the wife must wait for him. Some men only come back to be buried at home after they had died in the cities. Others come back with not a cent in their pockets, having been chased away by their urban wives because they are no longer useful to them, and their rural wives are then responsible to provide them with a livelihood.

The rural women often feel that urban women are more attractive. This may be related to the conditions in which rural women live, such as a lack of running water, poverty, lack of health facilities, and unemployment. They feel that their husbands are vulnerable to have extramarital affairs, which is highly possible, since many men leave their families for urban women.

Women are not allowed to visit their husbands in urban areas without notice. They must ask permission to come and the husband may refuse or allow her to come. If he refuses, a woman is not supposed to challenge the decision. The women also believe that it is not healthy to find out that your husband is having a love affair, because that does not solve any problem.



Instead, it creates conflict, and confronting the husband, whom they know is in a superior position, can lead him to leave the family or to marry a second wife.

Women generally regard rural areas as a true or permanent home where people settle. Life in rural areas is peaceful, cheap and people do not pay for any services, since most of the areas have no services. However, life in rural areas is also difficult. The women walk for long distances to fetch firewood or unhealthy water. They often cultivate their fields by themselves from which they harvest some bags of maize. They sometimes grind the maize themselves, using traditional grinding stones. A good wife is expected to use cow dung to plaster the floors of her house. These chores make life in rural areas difficult.

Traditionally, women used clay to build houses, cutting grass for roofing the house. Nowadays husbands often provide them with money to buy bricks, cement, corrugated iron, door frames, window frames, and window panes. Some women are known to have saved money by eating unhealthy food, such as porridge and dried vegetables, as long as they could have a house. People actually make fun of a wife who has enough food, but who does not have a big house and she will not be regarded as a good wife. Having a good house seems to be the pride of every woman or family. However, single mothers have no one to provide them with the above mentioned goods, and some still cut grass and use clay to build a house.

Although there are developments in some parts of the area where the study was done, such as the installation of electricity, telephones and tap water along the streets, one still finds some women going to the mountain to fetch firewood. Some people are very poor, without any income and it is very difficult for them to pay for electricity. Some only 'need a bag of mealie-meal', i.e., they just need to get porridge for survival and nothing more.

Some women are conservative, and still collect wood from the mountain even though they can afford electricity. They just want to save money or use it for something they cannot produce with their own hands, like buying cement and corrugated iron.

Women are supposed to bear many children, regardless of whether the husband is capable of maintaining the family or not. Husbands determine the number of children in the family, and families often have large numbers of children. Having many children is not only due to



pressure from husbands, but is also part of the values of the community, and the women want to satisfy their parents-in-law and the community.

A woman is also not supposed to refuse when her husband wants to marry another wife. If she complains, the man may confront her with alternatives, such as that she has to leave if she does not want him to have a second wife, or he may simply marry again without her consent. Since most rural wives depend on their husbands for their financial needs, and the community also supports polygamy, it is rare to find a woman leaving the family when her husband marries a second wife. It is better for a woman to secure her children's financial security, and to provide them with a father figure and a stable family environment, than to put her own emotional, physical and social needs first. Women depend on their husbands, they are proud of their working husbands while they take care of the children.

The new wife often already has children by other men. It is said *ngwana ke wa kgomo*, meaning a child belongs to the man who married his mother, and the biological father is not considered if he did not marry the mother of the children. He may even be taken to the traditional court if he insists on seeing his children while their mother is married to somebody else. The children of the new wife usually gets more love, attention and financial help from the father than the children of the first wife.

## **2.8.5 Views about children**

### **2.8.5.1 Girls**

Traditionally girls were not supposed to be educated. Parents believed it was a waste of money, because they were going to get married to other families and use their education to benefit other people. Today, this has changed and many girls attend school and tertiary educational institutions, even though a large number of them still see their future only in marriage. They attend school just because others do so, or just because they are still too young to get married. In such instances, they tend not to work hard on their academic work, and may fall pregnant before the age of twenty. This is reinforced by the values of the community, which regard being a good wife as more important than working hard at school. Lack of motivation to achieve academically can also be the result of poverty, where the children

are aware that they cannot afford to attend tertiary educational institutions and perceive marriage as a shortcut to a better life. Some parents also see marriage as a relief from maintaining a big family. Not only will there be one less dependant in the family, but the child will probably also give her parents some financial support after she got married.

### 2.8.5.2 Boys

A boy is regarded as an important asset in a family. A family without a boy may become unstable, because a father may want a boy, even to the extent that he may marry another wife to bear him a son, or he may leave his wife because she could not have a son. The reason for the importance of having a son is to maintain the continuation of the man's surname (*go tsoša leina*).

Parents expect from their sons to help them where they have failed, such as building them a house or providing for other things they cannot afford, such as paying for younger children's schooling. This is accepted as normal by the children, because they say "I want to get a job to help my parents, because they have been suffering with me". They do not speak about their own interests first. Parents may accordingly feel threatened when their working sons want to get married, because the son will then no longer be able to maintain them like before, even though boys are meant to marry and have more children to make the family big. Conflict might arise between parents and their daughter-in-law because she is seen as responsible for decreasing or stopping her husband's financial support of his family. In instances where this leads to conflicts between a man and his wife, his parents may not help him to resolve the problems in his relationship with his wife. They would rather place the blame on the woman and this might even culminate in the parents encouraging their son to marry a second wife.

Not all parents expect their children to support them. Some save money for the education of their children, invest money for their children to start a family, and help their children to deal with family life, but this does not occur commonly.



### **2.8.6 Discipline**

Since many fathers work far from their families, their relationship with their children is not as close as is the relationship between mothers and children. In most cases, the children send their mothers to speak with the fathers when they need something. The mother is thus used as an intermediary between the children and their father.

Discipline of the children by the father is usually not direct, but goes through the mother. However, ultimately the father is responsible for maintaining the good reputation of his family members. Most of the discipline is carried out by the mother because she is closer to the children. Only in very difficult matters, such as when a girl is pregnant, the mother refers it to the father. At times the mothers hide some bad behaviour of the children from their fathers, fearing that the punishment may negatively affect the whole family, for example the man may decide not to come home at the end of the month, or not to support them financially. At times the father blames a mother for deviant behaviour of the children.

Despite the distant relationship between the children and their fathers, the father plays an important role in the lives of the children. It is regarded as a great blessing to have a father. The father provides a sense of belonging for both the mother and the children. He is also responsible for providing financial security and contributes to the psychological well-being of the family.

### **2.8.7 Education**

There are children in rural areas who do not attend school because of financial constraints or because children are kept out of school to herd the cattle. However, many children do attend school and the community seems to be aware of the importance of education, because people encourage their children to go to school, but the spirit and culture of learning is not well developed. There is a high failure rate at schools, girls often fall pregnant, boys tease their teachers, and learning facilities are scarce. Children are often not sure whether they should invest their future in education or not, and this could also be the result of poverty. Education helps people to realise their potential, and a lack of education in rural areas might inhibit self-actualisation.



Religious beliefs may also have an impact on children's academic performance, since parents or priests and traditional healers ask the children to bring their books to the church or to traditional healers to perform some rituals, so that they will be able to pass their examinations. It is possible that the child may not study at all, hoping that the rituals will make miracles on her/his performance. The parents and the church members (ZCC, and other independent black churches) regard the rituals as more important for guaranteeing success, than studying hard, so this may be a contributory factor to the high failure rate at schools.

### 2.8.8 Communalism

Relatives and next-door neighbours play an important role in the life of a family. Rural black communities are usually poor, and people are not supposed to be selfish. They try to be kind to their neighbours so that they will be able to ask something that they need, such as salt, sugar and other things. Neighbours are often the first people to know when you are not feeling well, and they need to be treated with respect. It is believed that one cannot be on your own without other people. This is expressed in the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho*, which means that a person is a person in relation to other people.

### 2.8.9 Witchcraft

The belief in witchcraft, called *boloi* in Northern Sotho, is common in the area where the study was conducted. *Boloi* can be regarded as mysterious acts of people that cause death, illness or misfortune to others. The misfortune may include failure at school, causing conflicts in a family or causing a parent to leave the family, losing one's job, etc. The witches (*baloi*) may also use one to work for them, usually at night, which causes people to wake up tired the next morning.

Events or problems which are difficult to explain and to solve, or where the origin is mysterious, are often ascribed to witchcraft. The complexity of modern life and the stresses associated with it, could contribute towards interpreting events which are difficult to understand and deal with, to witchcraft. However, in some instances a person may know the cause of an event, for example why he has lost his job, but ascribe it to witchcraft to avoid the truth.

*Boloi* usually occurs in close relationships, such as between close relatives and co-workers, and often arises in situations of interpersonal conflict. When there is harmony, people tend not to interpret problems in terms of witchcraft; however, when relationships are disturbed, attributions of witchcraft are more likely to occur. *Boloi* could thus be seen as an expression of disharmony among people close to each other.

The identification and healing of *boloi* can be done by both spiritual healers and traditional healers. However, a person may also counteract *boloi* on his own through *thapelo* (prayer).

### 2.8.10 Religion

The independent black churches, such as the ZCC, play an important role in the lives of the members of the community where this study was conducted. These churches fulfil a role that goes further than only preaching the Christian religion. They also treat illness, but their work does not only involve curative interventions. They also intervene to prevent illness or misfortune from occurring. These preventative interventions can take different forms, including strengthening individuals and their families and possessions against misfortune, which provides people with a sense of security. Similarly, interpreting the causes of existing problems and predicting the future through prophesying, provides people with a sense of security and promotes their well-being.

One of the reasons why these churches play an important role, is that they integrate Christianity with the traditional world view and way of life. The office bearers of these churches, such as the spiritual healers, participate in the world view of their congregation, and have an intuitive understanding of the conflicts which are common in the community. This enables them to interpret illness and misfortune in terms of thought patterns which are familiar to the congregation and to intervene in ways in which the people have confidence.





## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The method used in this study, will be discussed in the following paragraphs with reference to the research design, sampling procedure, data collection and data analysis. Problems which are specific to research amongst adolescents, will also be discussed.

#### 3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

##### 3.2.1 The nature of qualitative research

A qualitative research method was used. This method provides freedom for discovery, to get a whole picture of a person's lived experiences. It is more personal and allows personal contact between the interviewer and interviewee. The qualitative research method yields an opportunity to establish rapport with the interviewee. Non-judgemental responsiveness by an interviewer are also regarded as an important aspect since it makes the subject feels accepted. No time limits are given to the interviewee and he or she is provided with an opportunity to respond in his or her own unique way, therefore there is no absolutely correct or incorrect response (Smith, 1996).

According to Neuman (1997) qualitative researchers emphasise the importance of the social context for understanding the social world. The meaning of social action or statements depends in an important way on the context in which it appears.

According to Ashworth, Giorgi and Koning (1986), an interviewee is likely to more readily divulge information if the interviewer is not an acquaintance. It is sometimes not easy for people to openly disclose information about themselves to a person known to them, fearing that the interviewer may look at them in a different way than before the interview. In this study, the fact that the interviewer was known to the interviewees, could have influenced the answers

they gave. However, the interviewer was careful in establishing good rapport and trust with the children, and ensured them of the confidentiality of the information they would give to her.

Even though qualitative research allows freedom of expression, it is sometimes advisable to use an interview schedule, to encourage flow and variety of pace. The respondents, when talking freely will, however, not adhere to the order of the schedule. They will cover topics before they are introduced and continually reintroduce those of importance to themselves. It is also important to rephrase questions to ensure the respondents understand what is required (Ashworth *et al.*, 1986).

The following characteristics of qualitative research are outlined by (Ashworth *et al.*, 1986):

**(a) The individual case study**

From a qualitatively point of view, intensive studies of individuals give the researcher a broad context of interpreting the meaning of an interviewee's psychological experiences. The researcher obtains a unique and penetrating knowledge of the relationship between the person's present life situation and his or her past history, and the role this plays in his or her behaviour, which may again provide a basis for understanding the more general conditions of human behaviour.

**(b) Open mode of observation**

Open observation implies that the researcher proceeds without a fixed design planned in advance, and allows the reality he/she encounters to determine the process. Such openness would enable the researcher to be less prejudiced in discovering the actual experiences of the participants in the study.

In the present study, an interview schedule was used, but in addition the researcher remained open for any additional information the children could perhaps give, and where necessary she deviated from the schedule.

### **(c) The interpretation of meaning**

The interpretation of data is open to multiple meanings and different layers of a particular experience or behaviour. Qualitative research does not maintain a strict line of demarcation between data and meaning, between description and interpretation. The word multiple determination implies that the one and the same act may have multiple meanings and motives. The meaning of an act may be ambiguous and contradictory, and qualitative research entails a methodological tolerance of ambiguity in the interpretation of meaning.

### **(d) Historical dimension**

The role accorded to the historical dimension of a person's life depends on the theoretical perspective of the researcher. Psychoanalysis, for example, formalises and tests interpretations about the meaning of human actions, in terms of a person's life history and its continued temporal unfolding.

### **(e) Human relationship**

The personal relationship between the researcher and the subjects involves layers of disclosure, the subject disclosing different layers of his personality according to his involvement in the personal relationship with the researcher. There may be a continuum of layers of interaction, yielding different depths of knowledge. There are the superficial formal contacts of everyday life, and there may be intensive and enduring emotional relationships.

The purpose of this study was to describe life experiences of black rural adolescence in the absence of their fathers. Therefore it is descriptive study. According to Robson (1993) and Wagenaar (1992) a descriptive study aims at portraying an accurate profile of a person, events or situation.



Neuman (1997) mentions the following as the goals of descriptive research:

- (a) To provide an accurate profile of individuals or a group.
- (b) To describe a process, mechanisms, or relationships.
- (c) To give a verbal or numerical picture of the phenomenon observed.
- (d) To find information to stimulate new explanations.
- (e) To present background information of a context.
- (f) To create a set of categories or to classify types.
- (g) To document information that contrasts with prior beliefs about the subject.

### **3.2.2 Criticism against the qualitative research method**

Qualitative research reveals only the information that the interviewee wishes to reveal, thus no guarantee exists that the person with whom the interview is being conducted, is telling the truth. One interviewer's interpretation of what the interviewee relates, can also differ from that of the next interviewer (Louw & Edwards, 1993). However, the experiences of the interviewee must be accepted as it is narrated from his or her point of view, which need not be to be the truth for someone else (Spradley, in Kvale, 1996). Failure to establish good rapport may result in invalid information, or perhaps even conflict between the interviewer and the interviewee (Smith, 1996).

## **3.3 THE PARTICIPANTS**

### **3.3.1 Identification and recruitment of the participants**

The participants were recruited from one high school in a rural village in the Northern Province. They comprised ten adolescents, five boys and five girls who are fatherless due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth or teenage pregnancy.

The method used for selection of the participants was purposive sampling. In the latter, the researcher uses his/her own judgement, depending on the topic, about which respondents to choose, and picks only those who best meet the purpose of the study. The advantage of

purposive sampling is that the researcher can use his/her research skill and prior knowledge to choose participants (Bailey, 1994).

The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 20 years and they were thus in middle and late adolescence.

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants were:

- (e) They had to be in middle or late adolescence.
- (f) They had to reside permanently in a rural village.
- (g) The child's father had to be absent from the family, due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth and teenage pregnancy; this excluded instances where a father had died. Father absence was determined by asking the child the following questions: Do you have a father? Where is he? Do you know him?
- (h) The participants had to be willing and able to articulate the information needed.
- (i) An equal number of boys and girls were selected.

### 3.3.2 Procedure

All matters regarding consent to conduct the study was obtained through the office of the principal of the school where the participants were recruited. The children were introduced to the nature of the research, and asked to participate, but they were also told that they could withdraw if they wanted to. Heller (1984) says that since participants have the option either to refuse to take part in a study, or to co-operate with the researcher, the researcher must come to an explicit agreement with the participants concerning their participation in the study.

In instances where emotional problems surfaced in the course of data collection, or when the participants expected that the researcher would assist them to come in contact with their fathers, the children were referred to the appropriate professional services available in the community, which mostly involved social workers.

### **3.3.3 Problems in studying adolescents**

Lloyd (1985) stated the following problems when conducting research amongst adolescents: Firstly, due to individual differences, there is disparity between chronological, physical and psychological development during adolescence. Consequently, research groups consisting of subjects of the same chronological age often produce widespread differences among themselves and this may confound the results.

The second problem concerns the validity of adolescent subjects' responses obtained in research. There are several factors that combine to make this a more serious issue in adolescent research. For instance, adolescents are at a self-conscious age. When questions of a personal or intimate nature are asked, individuals may adjust their answers, often unwittingly, in a direction they feel will make them appear in a positive light.

A third problem is the fact that adolescent attitudes and beliefs are undergoing self-examination and may change relatively rapidly. For example, an adolescent may not really know how he feels about religion at the time such a question is asked in a research study.

## **3.4 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The following techniques have used during data collection.

- (a) A personal interview
- (b) Draw-a-Person Test (DAP)
- (c) Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD)

These three methods of data collection will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **3.4.1 Personal Interviews**

#### **3.4.1.1 The nature of the interviews**

Language as a tool for communication played a central role in obtaining data for this study. According to Wagenaar (1992), language plays an important role at every stage of scientific



endeavour. In modern constructivist treatments, language is not merely a vehicle for talking about science, it is the way we do science. Indeed, it is through language that we construct the world and language is not only used to display the world. Language provides us with a tool for linking what we think with what we can see and touch.

According to Moore (in Muir, 2000) language, whether verbal or non-verbal, is a prerequisite for assignment of meaning. This occurs via internal and external dialogue through discussion with other people. Language can thus be used to make concealed meanings explicit, yet also to hide certain meanings (Venter, in Muir, 2000).

An interview schedule was constructed on the basis of the literature review, the theoretical orientation on which the study was based, and the researcher's personal experience. It covered the following themes:

- (a) Economic status of the family.
- (b) The adolescent's social interaction.
- (c) Whether the mother had any boyfriends.
- (d) General problems in the family.
- (e) Perception of self.
- (f) Views about a good family composition.
- (g) Views about marriage.
- (h) How they rated themselves in terms of academic achievement.
- (i) Views about education.
- (j) Future expectations.
- (k) What they thought were the reasons for their fathers' absence.
- (l) The child's feelings about father absence.
- (m) Perceptions about other children who live with their fathers.
- (n) Problems and benefits with regard to father absence and support from other people.

All the interviews were conducted in North-Sotho and subsequently translated by the researcher.

The interviews were conducted over three days in a room that was made available to the researcher. A tape recorder was used during the interviews and the participants were asked

permission to record the information they provided. They were also assured that personal detail would be treated as confidential. The use of a tape recorder facilitated the process of interviewing, in that it allowed good eye contact between the researcher and the participants, observation of non-verbal communication and rapid flow of information.

In addition, brief field notes were also made during the interview, and elaborated upon directly after the interview. This came in handy, because in three of the interviews the tape recorder did not function properly, and in addition some of the children spoke very softly. It must thus be remembered that in three instances verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were not available.

Some participants were not talkative by nature and did not easily share information. The use of the drawing techniques helped to establish rapport with them. The administration of the DAP and KFD included asking questions about the drawings, and this provided information about the children themselves and the family environment. The impression was gained that these children found it easier to respond to the drawings, rather than to a direct interview.

#### **3.4.1.2 Analysis of interview data**

Data were firstly transcribed from the tape recordings to written information in harmony with the specific mode of expression (e.g., pauses, repetitions). Then the information was structured in the form of a narrative story. The "narrative creator" approach was used. It requires to look at the responses of the participants to form a coherent and understandable story (Kvale, 1996).

The analytic comparative method of data analysis was used in this study. According to Neuman (1997), the researcher develops ideas about regularities or patterns in relations, either from pre-existing theories or through induction. The researcher then focuses on a few regularities and makes contrasts with alternative explanations, and looks for regularities that are not limited to a specific setting (time, place, or group). He is not seeking universal laws, only regularities within a social context.

Neuman (1997) describes the following method of analytic comparison:

### **(a) Method of agreement**

The researcher focuses on what is common across cases. He establishes the cases that have a common outcome, then tries to locate a common cause, although other features of cases may differ. The method proceeds by a process of elimination. He eliminates features as possible causes if they are not shared across cases that have a common outcome. For instance, a researcher may look at four cases, which share two common features, but they also differ in many respects. He then looks for one or two or more common causes to explain the common outcome in all cases.

### **(b) Method of difference**

This method can be used together with the method of agreement. A researcher first locates cases that are similar in many respects but differ in a few crucial ways. He pinpoints features whereby one set of cases is similar with regard to, for example, outcomes and causal features, and another set which differs on outcomes and causal features. The method of differences reinforces information from positive cases. Thus a researcher looks for cases that share many features, but lack some key features and have a different outcome.

According to Neuman (1997), a qualitative researcher forms new concepts that are grounded in the data. Concept formation is an integral part of data analysis and begins during data collection. Thus conceptualisation is the way that a qualitative researcher organises and makes sense of data.

A qualitative researcher analyses data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features. The researcher may develop new concepts, and formulate conceptual definitions. The relationships among concepts are examined, and eventually the concepts are linked to each other in terms of a sequence, or sets of similar categories that the researcher interweaves into theoretical statements (Neuman, 1997).



Data need to be coded to reduce it into manageable groups. Neuman (1997) mentions the following types of coding:

**(a) Open coding**

This is performed when going through recently collected data. The researcher locates themes and assigns initial codes or labels in a first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories. The researcher is open to create new themes and changes the initial codes (or labels) in subsequent analyses. He brings the themes to the surface from deep inside the data. In this study, the questions asked were based on the literature and thus the theory influenced the themes that were identified.

**(b) Axial coding**

The researcher now focuses on the initial codes or preliminary concepts, more than on the original data. Additional codes or new ideas may develop and must be noted. The researcher moves towards organising the ideas or themes and identifies the axis of the key concepts in analysis. In axial coding, the researcher looks for categories or concepts that cluster together, i.e., combining several closely related concepts into one, which is of a more general nature, dividing existing concepts into subcategories. This coding stimulates thinking about the linkage between the themes and raises new question.

**(c) Selective coding**

This involves scanning data and previous codes. The researcher looks selectively for cases that illustrate themes and make comparisons and contrasts after most or all data collection is completed. An example of this is whether gender is related to particular themes.

In the present study, where applicable, themes from the projective techniques were integrated with the themes from the interview. However, the projective techniques also provided additional information not mentioned during the interviews.

### **3.4.2 Projective techniques**

According to Machover (1949) and Klepsch and Logie (1982), projective methods of exploring motivations have repeatedly uncovered deep and perhaps unconscious aspects of self-expression, which could not be made manifest in direct communication. It is safe to assume that all creative activity bears the specific stamp of the individual characteristics of the individual who is creating.

#### **3.4.2.1 Draw-a-Person Test (DAP)**

Machover (1949) and Klepsch and Logie (1982) pointed out that drawing may be a projection of the self-concept, of attitudes towards someone else in the environment, or of the ideal self image. It may also be a result of external circumstances, an expression of emotional tone and an expression of the subject's attitude towards life and society in general.

##### **(a) Administration**

The DAP is an individual test. Each participant was provided with an A4 blank sheet of paper and soft pencil. An eraser was not provided. Then the researcher instructed the participant to draw a person, followed by the person of the opposite sex. The participants were told that the researcher is not interested in their drawing ability, as long as they draw a person. Questions by the participants were answered in a non-directive manner.

The following inquiries were made about the pictures:

Who is this person?

How is he/she?

Is he/she married?

With whom does he live?

Does he prefer his/her mother or father?

Does he/she have brothers or sisters?

Is he/she working and what type of work is he/she doing?

What is his/her ambition?

- How smart is he/she?
- How strong is he/she?
- How good looking is he/she?
- What is generally on his/her mind?
- What fears does he/she have?
- What is he/she sad about?
- What makes him/her angry?
- Does he/she prefer to be alone or with other people?
- What do other people say about him/her?
- Whom does he/she remind you?
- Is there anything you want to add about the person?

The participants were very co-operative, and no problems were experienced by the researcher except that the administration of the DAP was time consuming. The above mentioned inquiry helped the researcher to get a clearer picture of the participants' psychological experiences. Some participants drew members of their families, and this helped the researcher to get information about family relationships. Some of the information gathered during the administration of the in DAP was later elaborated upon during the interview.

## **(b) Analysis**

The pictures were analysed by taking the following features into consideration: the parts of the body that were drawn, clothing, facial expression and the postural tone of the figure. The positions of pictures on the paper, the size, slant, shading, transparencies, omissions, distortions and were also considered during analysis (Burns, 1990).

For instance, the placement of a picture at the right side of the page could indicate stability and controlled behaviour, and the ability to delay satisfaction of needs and drives. Gross distortions and omissions may indicate poor reality contact or a mood disturbance, while moderate distortions may indicate conflicts. Transparency in the drawings could suggest poor judgement, anxiety/conflict, or sexual disturbances. With regard to body parts, a big head may indicate intellectual aspirations or it may indicate aggressive tendencies, while a small head



may indicate feelings of intellectual inadequacy (Koppitz 1968; Machover, 1949; Newmark, 1985).

#### **2.4.2.2 Kinetic family drawing (KFD)**

Hulse (in Klepsch & Logie, 1982) stated that the family drawing can be used in normal children to examine important aspects of family dynamics. Koppitz (1968) believed that children's drawings of their families reflect their unconscious attitudes, including negative attitudes, towards their families.

##### **(a) Administration**

The KFD is also an individual test. Each participant was provided with blank A4 paper and a soft pencil. They were instructed to draw a picture of everyone in their family including themselves doing something. They were asked to draw the whole person, not cartoon or stick pictures. They were also asked to mention the names of the people they drew, the objects drawn and what the people were doing (Klepsch & Logie, 1982).

##### **(b) Analysis**

The analysis of KFD was based on the actions or movements of the people, rather than on inert figures. Styles such as compartmentalisation or underlining of the pictures were considered suggestive of an unstable home environment. Actions portraying the family members fulfilling conventional gender roles, such as the mother cooking and the father reading newspaper, were considered positive indicators of good family functioning (Klepsch & Logie, 1982).

Actions which portrayed the family members being more concerned about objects than other people, such as the mother cleaning or ironing and the father going to work or working outside, were considered negative indicators (Burns & Kaufman, 1970; Klepsch, & Logie 1986).

Di Leo (in Klepsch & Logie, 1982) considered the following to be significant in the family drawings: omission of a member of the family, omission of self, parental figure the child placed

himself closest to, similarity in style of clothing to another member, role in the family interaction and isolation.

### **3.5 PILOT STUDY**

A pilot study was conducted with two participants known to the researcher. The parents of the participants were firstly asked permission. It was aimed to check the feasibility of the study, including the researcher's social interactive skills, efficiency of the data collection methods, assessing sources of bias and refining the method of data analysis (Edwards, Miles & Huberman, in Segoati, 1997). Based on the pilot study, the researcher modified her approach where necessary.

The pilot study was done to two participants. The first one was a fourteen-year-old boy, who was in early adolescence. The researcher then decided to interview a second child, a girl, who met the requirement for being either in middle or late adolescence. The data from both interviewees was analysed to test the method of data analysis.

### **3.6 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS**

The results were interpreted on the basis of the literature review, theoretical background and the social context of the participants. The method of analytic generalisation was used, which means that a reasoned judgement is used as a guide to what might occur in another situation (Kvale, 1996).

### **3.7 CREDIBILITY AND STABILITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

In this study, the credibility and stability of the data were enhanced in different ways:

- a. To increase the likelihood that stable and credible knowledge would be gained, the researcher was careful to establish good relationships with the participants. The purpose of the study was explained to them, their co-operation was requested, and they were assured of the confidentiality of personal details. Efforts were made to establish a

- relationship of trust in which they could express their true feelings without fear of disapproval from the interviewer.
- b. The researcher took the context in which the participants lived into account in the interpretation of the data. This included the characteristics of life in a rural village, and relevant cultural beliefs, values and norms, as described in Chapter 2.
  - c. Different methods of data collection were used, namely a personal interview, the DAP and KFD. To the extent that the information obtained from these different methods converged and supplemented or confirmed each other, the credibility of the data was improved (Reason & Rowan, 1981).
  - d. Stability refers to the extent to which data becomes constant over time. In the present study, this was accounted for by repeatedly going through the data and identifying themes (i.e., codes or labels) and categories. These themes (codes or labels) and categories were revised, until no new themes or groupings of themes into categories could be differentiated. Going round the cycle of data analysis several times helped to enhance the stability of the results. The transcriptions of the interviews were read a number of times, and concepts were checked and rechecked so that the themes and categories could progressively be refined, differentiated from one another, and integrated, to reach a theoretical saturation point (Dlukulu, 2000).
  - e. Credibility involves a correspondence between the way in which participants perceive certain issues, and the way in which the researcher portrays their viewpoints (Dlukulu, 2000). In this regard, the researcher's supervisor repeatedly challenged the researcher's views in an effort to promote an accurate reflection as possible of the meanings intended by the participants.
  - f. Interviews were conducted individually with participants, and the commonalities in their narratives provided evidence of intersubjective knowledge. At the same time, individual experiences were also recognised and retained.



g. Since all the interviews were conducted in the home language of the participants, they could express their experiences comfortably and this could have enhanced the credibility of the results.

h. A pilot study was conducted with the view to refine the method of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

### 3.8 CONCLUSION

A qualitative research method was used, including the use of personal interviews and two projective techniques. Ten adolescents were recruited from a high school in a rural area in the Northern Province. A pilot study was conducted to pretest the various stages of the research process.

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## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The categories of experience, comprising the different themes which were identified from the interviews with the ten participants will be described in this chapter.

#### 4.2 FAMILY BACKGROUND

The family environment of nearly all the participants was characterised by low cohesiveness, lack of support by their fathers, unpleasant conditions, feelings of not belonging and the role of the extended family.

##### 4.2.1 Low cohesiveness

In the case of nine of the participants, either the participant or a sibling stayed with relatives such as grandparents, uncles, a mother's younger sister (*mmame*), or sisters who had their own houses. The reason for this was financial problems, such as lack of food and clothing and being unable to pay school fees and the children therefore had to rely on relatives for financial support.

Low cohesiveness was also reflected in the KFDs of four participants, by individualisation of the family members (i.e., being involved in individual activities) instead of interacting with each other. Some participants who stayed with their extended families, did not draw the latter but the members of their own nuclear family in the KFD. This indicated the importance they attached to the nuclear family and probably a wish to live with their own immediate family.

Although some extended families accepted the children, others regarded them as unwelcome and a burden to support. In the case of three of the participants the result of this was that they

moved from one relative's household to another. Changing residence was not only due to conflicts. One boy who grew up with his grandmother, returned to his mother's house after his father left the family, so that he could help her.

#### 4.2.2 Paternal contact

Six of the participants said they did not know their fathers. None of the participants got any form of support from their fathers. One participant, for example, said "My father does not visit us or give me money for school fees". Another one said he felt bad about his siblings during Christmas and wished he could help them, because they did not have Christmas clothes, while other children around the village got new clothes. (In the village where the study was done, it is customary to buy children new clothes at Christmas time).

Seven participants expressed a need to be with their biological fathers, giving different reasons. One child was worried that if another man were to come into the household, he may not treat them well and it will also reduce the chances of reconciling with his biological father. Another child said the family was ready to forgive the father, and even if he were ill they would welcome him back, because he is the father of the family and no one will ever replace him. Another child said he needed his father to get dignity and respect from the community. Only two children, who were born out of wedlock, said their mother should marry another man, because their biological fathers were married to somebody else.

The children gave various reasons for the absence of their fathers. Three participants referred to witchcraft. Two mentioned that her fathers loved them very much, and felt that he left them because of witchcraft. Another one said the witches were taking advantage of the family because they were fatherless, by making them do manual work for the witches during the night so that they wake up tired in the morning.

However, not all the children knew what had driven their fathers away, and they said they would like to hear from their mothers or their fathers why they left them. Some participants said that their mothers had told them why the fathers left, but they did not understand. One girl said that she did not ask why her father left because it was an adult matter, and she was not supposed to be involved



### 4.2.3 Unpleasant conditions at home

The children did not feel happy or comfortable about their family environments. There was evidence of conflicts, including physical conflicts and poor interaction between the members of the family. For instance, in her KFD one participant drew her mother and uncle verbally insulting one another. Another one said her uncle frequently assaults her mother, he has even assaulted her with an axe, and did not want her mother and the children at home. (The family was staying at the child's grandmother's home, where the uncle also lived).

Another child, who was staying with his two uncles, his mother's sister, grandmother and uncles' wife reported that he did not look forward to going home after school: "I totally do not enjoy to be at home. I get no happiness, my uncle's wife and mother's sister are not in good terms. I need my own family so that I can eat and watch TV whenever I want."

### 4.2.4 Feelings of not belonging

The children who were living with relatives, said that they did not feel that they were real members of the family. One participant, who lost both his parents and stayed at his uncle's place, reported that his cousin did not want him in her home. Another participant who had never lived in the same home with her own nuclear family and stayed with her grandparents, reported that there was continuous conflict and every now and again, an uncle, who also lived there and who was mentally disturbed, chased them away. She said: "I wish my grandfather will allow my mother to move to her own place with her children."

All the participants who stayed at their grandparents' place expressed a need to have their own home, since they did not enjoy the environment where they lived in (as discussed above). One participant, whose mother never married, underlined the pictures in the KFD, which suggested a lack of security and instability within the family environment.

Those who were deserted by their fathers after once having lived together, wished to complete or extend the houses left unfinished by their fathers; others wanted to buy big and nice houses for their mothers since their fathers failed to do so. For example, one boy who was staying with

his mother in a temporary structure said: "I will only get married after buying my mother a house, I do not want to see her suffering while I am working."

#### 4.2.5 The role of the extended family

The extended family did not only cause stress for the participants, as described above, but also played a supportive role. The extended family such as such as uncles, cousins and grandparents provided them with second-hand clothing, food, money, etc. Six of the participants said they depended on their grandparents for most of the things they needed. They also got emotional support, such as assuring them that it was not their fault that their fathers had left them.

Not all the children lived with their extended families. Some of them, whose fathers left them after they had established their own homes, lived in more conducive family environments. They did not get stress from members of the extended family, but got help from them, such as providing them every so often with food, money, or other essentials.

### 4.3 FINANCIAL SITUATION

All the participants experienced financial problems, due to unemployment of the mothers or, if she worked, the low income she earned, and lack of child support from their fathers. The information given above, namely that the children and their families often relied on their extended families for food, clothing and other essentials, must be borne in mind with regard to the financial position of the children.

Three participants reported that their mothers were not employed, five said their mothers worked as domestic workers around the village, but earned insufficient money to meet their needs.

Three participants reported that they were working part-time to help their families. One repaired shoes, radios and television sets. Another child did gardening at a missionary's house and another one sold sweets and peanuts.

Almost all the participants complained about food and clothes. One said most of the time he had nothing to eat at home or during lunch at school. Most of them felt they could not attend tertiary education institutions due to the financial difficulties within their families

#### **4.4 SOCIAL SUPPORT**

Almost all the participants received support from their social network, such as friends, the church, school and relatives.

##### **4.4.1 Support from relatives**

The participants got help from the extended family (as discussed in paragraph 4.2). One participant reported that her married sister gave them some food from her in-laws. Her married sister left her son with her biological parents, and this gave her an excuse to provide them with food and money, since she was supporting her son.

##### **4.4.2 Friends**

Seven participants reported that their friends provided them with support and those friends also enjoyed their company. One boy said his friends paid his fees for a trip the school had arranged, so that he could be with them. Another child was suicidal and easily fought with her friends; however, her friends still encouraged her and said that her mother still needed her help, because she suffered raising them alone. Another child said he enjoyed life at school with his friends, because at home he found no happiness due to poor family relationships. Others said their friends shared their lunch with them since they did not have food for lunch.

However, two participants reported that they often got stress from their friends. One said his friends looked down upon him since his father left the family. The other one said his friends interpreted his mistakes as the result of his father's absence. Only one girl said she did not have friends at all, because her mother told her that friends could influence her to do wrong things.



#### 4.4.3 Church

Four of the participants were members of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), three of the Roman Catholic Church, one of the WatchTower and two did not belong to any church. Most of the participants received a lot of support from their churches, which included prayer, providing them with the opportunity for part-time work, prediction of the future, explanations for the causes of their problems, and healing of illnesses.

The prayers and the Gospel (good news) give them hope for life. One said he always prayed for his father to come back. There were choirs at the church that kept their minds off their family problems. When they sang in the choirs, there was a spirit of happiness and their unhappiness receded into the background. One of the participants worked in the missionary of the church during holidays to help his family with money.

The members of the ZCC get predictions of the future and the causes of their problems from the prophets in the church. One child said the prophet told them that her father was driven away by witches. Another one said the church rituals healed her mentally disturbed uncle.

The church also helped them to maintain their moral values, such as not drinking alcohol, smoking, and not to be violent when confronted with problems. One participant who was a member of the ZCC said he couldn't drink alcohol, because many people knew he was a member of the ZCC, and he made a public commitment to the church.

#### 4.4.4 School

The teachers at school also provided support to some of the children. For example, one participant said his teachers understood his problems and helped him, through giving him advice of how to deal with life's problems.

### 4.5 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL AND FUTURE GOALS

Three of the participants reported that they wanted to work after finishing their matric because of the financial problems they experienced (as described above). Almost all of them wanted to

help their mothers when they are working. They wanted to buy houses for their families and pay school fees for their siblings. The participants emphasised helping their parents. In the DAP inquiry one participant said her brother was worried, because he was unable to get a job and his mother was working while other women stayed at home. She also said that the people in the village were laughing at her mother when she went to work. She said her brother wanted to see his mother not working anymore.

Four participants said they wanted to attend tertiary education institutions even though they did not have money. One said he hoped his mother would be working when he finished his matric so that she could pay for his studies. Another one said the church members (Roman Catholic) promised to support him to go to university. Two said their relatives might help them to further their education, which also reflects the supportive role of the extended family. The children were not aware that they could obtain bursaries or loans to further their studies.

Almost all of the children regarded school as a good thing and they gave different reasons for this. Two of the participants perceived school positively because it "gives them light." One said it helps children to read and write and another one said it helps them to express themselves in English when looking for a job.

Seven participants said school was good because they performed well at school and they never failed any standard. For instance, one said he was academically gifted and he wanted to do electrical engineering after matric. Another one said she could perform well, but she did not study hard.

Four participants reported that they enjoyed school because it was a place where they could meet their friends, and they had good relationships with the teachers. One participant said his teachers understood his problems and gave him advice on how to deal with life's problems. Another one said his friends were not welcome at home, so he could only meet his friends at school.

However, there were also things that disappointed them at school. Two said they hated it when the teachers have sexual relationships with schoolgirls. Three said they disliked physical punishment at school: "Teachers can use any other punishment than the corporeal one



because it is painful.” Two said they disliked it when their classmates made noise and teased the teachers. They were also worried about the high failure rate at the school and the teachers going on strike.

#### 4.6 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MEN

With the exception of one child, all the participants said that they did not trust men and the reasons given were that men may kill others, rape women, abandon their own offspring, have extramarital affairs, contract sexual diseases which they could transmit to their wives, and impregnate school girls. In some DAP pictures the males had hidden or cut-off hands, which suggested inadequacy in males to cope effectively with the demands of life. In some pictures, males were smaller than females and that also suggested that men were perceived as less able to deal with demands. However, one child felt that not all men are untrustworthy, since some take care of their families.

#### 4.7 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Almost all the participants perceived marriage positively, and gave different reasons. Six participants viewed marriage as good because it provides children with two parents to take care of them, unlike the situation they were in. One said marriage is good because the parents will have children to help them. Another one said marriage reduces the family size (i.e., when a married son or daughter moves out of the house): “Life is very expensive, my sister is now married, the family is small and the food can last for a longer period.”

All the participants wished to get married when grown-up and have small families. Some said they wanted to take their children to private schools because of the high failure rate at the local schools and lack of co-operation between the teachers and pupils. Two reported that they wanted to get married only after helping their parents (as discussed above). Two girls said they wanted to get married on condition that they were first educated and employed, to secure financial security for their children, in case their husbands were to leave them. Both these girls came from families where the parents were divorced and they were thus familiar with the possibility of divorce. One girl said she wished to get married in order to get out of her unfavourable family environment.



However, the children gave a different perspective on their mothers' adjustment. Five participants  
One girl, who had a child but was deserted by her boyfriend, said she did not believe she would  
get married but if she did marry, she wished to get married to an old man so that he could take  
care of her. She added that some of her friends were married to older men and they were  
taking care of them.

#### 4.8 BOYFRIENDS OF THE MOTHER

The majority of the participants did not experience any problems with regard to their mothers'  
boyfriends. Six of them said there were no men coming to visit their mothers. One said his  
mother was a well-behaving person, and that she had married friends. (In the area where the  
study was done, it is believed that if a woman is married and goes in the company of other  
married women, it indicates that she will behave well, as married women do. Married women  
should not have unmarried friends, but should have friends of their own status). The other five  
children said they never saw any men coming to visit their mothers.

Two said some men used to come in the family, but they thought those men came for  
something else than their mothers, for example: "Those men coming in my home, they are  
working with her, so I do not have problems with them."

However, two children reported that they had a problem with the men who visited their mothers.  
One said that a man came at night, and they were worried that he might hurt their mother. The  
other one said that the man who visited her mother had his own children, and she feared that  
his wife might confront her mother. She also did not want that man to leave his children for  
them.

#### 4.9 INTERPERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

In the interviews, most of the participants related that they had good interpersonal relationships  
with the people in their surroundings. They reported that they enjoyed the company of their  
friends, teachers and their parents. One child said he never behaved in ways that the  
community would disapprove of, and that his teachers appreciated his behaviour.

However, the DAP gave a different perspective on their social adjustment. Five participants indicated poor social interest, by omitting eyes and ears in the pictures.

#### **4.10 PERCEPTIONS OF THE SELF**

Although these children were abandoned by their fathers and went through stressful experiences with other people such as relatives and friends, nearly all of them felt positive about themselves, because the same people who gave them stress, also provided them with support. Most of them performed well at school. They reported that they would like to be those who have fathers, but that did not mean that children with fathers were better than them, because they also have their own problems.

In the DAP, eight participants drew their pictures in the centre of the page, which suggested self-directiveness and confidence to deal with demands. Their ability to adjust helped them to deal with the problems they experienced in their family environments. However, there were also indications of insecurity and this will be described in paragraph 4.12.

#### **4.11 SEXUAL IDENTITY**

The sexual identity of eight participants was not negatively affected. In their KFDs they did not show any identify confusion in their sexuality, i.e., they assigned male roles to the males and female roles to the females.

Only two participants showed some sexual identity confusion. In the DAP of one child, whose mother died and whose father left them, the male and female pictures did not show any sexual differentiation, which brought the suggestion of sexual identity confusion. The other one was a girl who drew the person of the opposite sex (male) first in her DAP. Although this could reflect sexual identity confusion, it must be borne in mind that it could also relate to identification with her grandfather, since she mentioned that he was the most important person in her life.

## 4.12 EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

The participants expressed feelings of helplessness and insecurity, shame, anger, blame and abandonment.

### 4.12.1 Feelings of helplessness and insecurity

Six of the participants who spoke about the bad treatment they received from family members, said they could not do anything about it, because they were young and their mothers were also too poor to take them out of the situation.

All ten participants experienced financial insecurity. They were abandoned by their fathers, while not receiving any financial support from them. Their mothers were also not employed and those who were employed got a low salary.

Emotional insecurity was also evident amongst the children. Nearly all the participants indicated feelings of rejection and of not being loved, either by their father or some other family members. They did not feel secure and settled in their families. One participant said she wished to have her own home since her uncle sometimes chased them with an axe. Two children drew pictures with small feet in the DAP and one underlined his pictures in the KFD, which suggested a lack of stability and security. Slanting figures in two participants' drawings also suggested feelings of helpless and insecurity. Dependency was reflected in DAP pictures of six participants by drawing buttons on the clothes. Short and weak arms in the drawings of one participant in the DAP suggested feelings of inadequacy and a need for support from the external environment.

The drawings of symbols of heat (such as tea, stove, fire and light) in the DAP and KFD pictures of six participants suggested a need for warmth and love, which their fathers and other relatives deprived them of.



#### 4.12.2 Shame

Seven participants did not show or express feelings of shame because of their parents' behaviour. They felt that it was not their fault and that they were not to be blamed for their fathers' absence. The support from other people who said that they were not to be blamed for their fathers' absence, also gave them strength and hope for life.

Only three participants expressed shame about their parents' behaviour. One boy said the neighbours and friends looked down upon him after his father left the family. Two girls said they did not like it when their mothers got involved with married men, because these men have children to care of. They felt ashamed of it because in the village other people would get to know about it and this would devalue the mother.

#### 4.12.3 Anger

In the interviews, only three participants described anger on their side. One said he punched other boys, but did not hurt them. Another one said friends teased him and he was not sure if he would be blamed if he hit them, because he was not afraid of them. The last one said she easily fought with her friends.

However, seven participants indicated aggressive tendencies in their DAP pictures. The following indicators illustrate this: long arms and big hands suggest overt aggression, the mouth drawn as a line suggests oral aggression, while a big head may also suggest aggression. A large nose and hands extended away from the body suggest externally directed aggressive needs.

#### 4.12.4 Blame

Seven participants blamed their fathers for leaving the family, and said their fathers were womanisers. According to them, there is no problem when a man lives without his family because he works in an urban area, but he must come back home, either monthly, fortnightly or weekly and failing to do so, he is to be blamed. Two blamed family conflicts for the disintegration of their families, and they believed that their fathers did not visit them because

they feared their mothers, since they fought before and most likely feared that their mothers still held a grudge against them and would not welcome them back. This implies that their mothers were indirectly blamed for their father not returning. Two blamed witchcraft for their fathers' absence. Omission of hands of the male person in some DAP pictures suggested failure to behave correctly – i.e., that the male person behaved incorrectly in the sense that he caused the problems in the family.

#### 4.12.5 Rejection/abandonment

Almost all children felt their fathers rejected them, for example: "My father does not love me, he even failed to buy me clothes after my birth at the hospital, I left the hospital naked". They felt the people who were supposed to take care of them deserted them, and they were left with questions such as why their fathers left them.

### 4.13 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the categories of experience in the context of father absence were described. Eleven categories were identified, namely:

- (a) family background
- (b) financial situation
- (c) social support
- (d) perceptions about school and future goals
- (e) perceptions about men
- (f) perceptions about marriage
- (g) boyfriends of the mother
- (h) interpersonal adjustment
- (i) perceptions of the self
- (j) sexual identity
- (k) emotional experiences

These categories of experience will be interpreted in the next chapter.

## 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.



## CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the main findings of the study, and also includes a critical evaluation of the study and recommendations.

### 6.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The aim of this study was to describe the psychological experiences of black rural adolescents in the absence of their fathers.

Eleven categories of experience were identified as having a great impact on the participants, namely:

- (a) family conditions in which the children lived which included the role of the extended family
- (b) the nature and impact of financial problems experienced by the children
- (c) the kinds of social support they received
- (a) perceptions about school and future goals
- (b) perceptions about men
- (c) perceptions about marriage
- (d) boyfriends of the mother
- (e) interpersonal adjustment
- (f) perceptions of the self
- (g) sexual identity
- (h) emotional experiences

These themes overlap and influence one another.

All the participants reported that their families experienced financial difficulties, and that they often lacked food and clothes. As a result, either the participant him-/herself or a sibling had to stay with extended family members. Thus, financial problems could be regarded an important cause for family instability. In instances where the mother had never been married, the children grew up in an extended family environment from birth. Others received financial support from the extended family, while staying in their own homes.

Almost all the participants felt that they would not be able to attend tertiary education because of financial difficulty in their families, unless they received help from relatives or institutions such as the church. They believed the situation was brought about by their fathers who left them, because in rural areas the man is still, in most families, the only person responsible for the economic status of the family.

Their economic problems were also expressed in their future goals. Some of the children said that when they grow up, they are going to get a job and help their mothers because they have been living in poverty. The boys said they wanted to build houses for their mothers or, when they lived in half-completed houses, they wanted to finish building it. They also said they did not want to see their siblings suffering anymore. All the boys said they wanted to get married and do better in their families than their fathers did.

The emotional experiences reported were feelings of rejection or abandonment, anger, shame and blame. They blamed their fathers for abandoning them, but they were not always certain of the reasons for this. Two attributed the absence of their fathers to witchcraft. Most of the participants were ready to forgive their fathers. Those children whose fathers left the family after marriage, did not want men other than their biological fathers for their mothers and themselves. Six participants reported that their mothers were not involved with other men, thinking their mothers were well-behaved women in terms of the expectations of society.

Although only three participants expressed their anger verbally, in the DAP and KFD pictures, there was a tendency to express aggression.

Some participants expressed shame about their parents' situation, saying that other people now look down upon them

Overall, the participants did not trust men, and said the reason was that men are capable of killing, raping and abandoning their own offspring, having extramarital affairs, transmitting sexual diseases to their wives, and impregnating schoolgirls. They felt marriage was good because it provides the children with two parents to take care of them. They associated marriage with care, rather than any other aspect of love. However, there was also uncertainty about being married and some girls said they would only get married when they were educated and working, so as to be able to take care of her children should their husbands leave them. They felt they might repeat the mistakes of their parents.

Even though the participants experienced many difficulties in their lives, they got social support from the friends, relatives, the church and school. The family provided them with material help such as clothes and food. They also assured them that it was not their fault that their fathers deserted them. Friends provided them with advice, food, and companionship which was not provided by the family. They also got spiritual support from the church by means of prayer and through the sermons. The school gave them an environment to meet their friends and to get advice from their teachers.

However, relatives were also a source of stress. They reported that they were not happy because of continuous conflicts in their families. They also felt that they did not belong to the family, because their uncles reminded them that they were not legitimate members of the family. They thought it would be better if they were to have their own home/house to get out of that situation. Some friends also interpreted their mistakes as the result of being fatherless.

With regard to interpersonal adjustment, perceptions of the self and sexual identity, varied results were obtained. Some children adjusted well on an interpersonal level, whereas with some there were indications of a lack of social interest. Similarly, some children did not present with problems regarding their self-concept, whereas others presented with feelings of insecurity and a lack of confidence. Except for two children, there were no indications of problems regarding sexual identity.



## **6.3 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

### **6.3.1 Research design**

The researcher used a qualitative research method. This required direct contact between the researcher and the participants. Overall, the children were willing to share their stories even though it was demanding for the researcher to handle some of the issues such as the emotional reactions of the children when they told their stories. Some of the participants expected something in return from the researcher for sharing the information, such as the expectation that she would assist them to come in contact with their fathers. One even brought a friend afterwards with the hope that the researcher would assist in solving their problems. However, the researcher's aim was to collect data and nothing more, and she referred these children to the appropriate service such as social workers.

The method and the topic of research required from the researcher to establish good rapport with the children, but she also had to be honest about the reasons for the interviews. This openness helped the participants to express their feelings freely. However, the topic itself is emotionally provoking and seemed to touch the participants, as if old wounds were opened up. This required from the researcher to provide acceptance and support to the children.

In qualitative research it is important that the researcher is aware of her emotional reactions to the narratives of her participants, so as to guard against unnecessarily avoiding to discuss certain aspects, or to be biased in her interpretation of the data. An honest and open attempt by the researcher to try and enter the worlds of the children as they experience it, and to understand their experiences from their point of view helped to enhance the credibility of the results.

### **6.3.2 The participants**

All the participants came from a rural area and this places a limitation on the extent to which the findings can be generalised. Unique characteristics of the context in which the research was done, such as the generally low socio-economic status of people in rural areas, and local

cultural beliefs and customs, might have influenced the life experiences of the children who participated in the study. This might not apply in other contexts.

All the participants were fatherless due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth or teenage pregnancy. This also limits the generalisability of the findings, because it might not apply to children whose fathers are absent for other reasons, such as being imprisoned or going into political exile.

### 6.3.3 Method of data collection

Personal interviews, Draw-a-Person tests (DAP) and Kinetic Family Drawings (KFD) were used. Although most of the participants were co-operative and willing to share their stories during the personal interview, it was more effective to combine it with projective techniques. It was apparent for the researcher that it was easier for some of the participants to tell a story about the person they have drawn, rather than providing the information in the interview itself. Some of the interview information was the same as that which came from the DAP and KFD. However the projective techniques also revealed additional information that the participants failed to narrate during the interview.

The DAP test included inquiries about the pictures, and this helped the researcher gauge the psychological experiences of the participants. For example, if a child drew a relative, the enquiry about this shed light on aspects such as the quality of relationships. The KFD was used to determine how family conflicts might be projected and provided clues regarding important aspects of the family dynamics (Hulse, in Klepsch, 1982).

Machover (1949) and Klepsch and Logie (1982) posit that projective methods of exploring motivations have repeatedly uncovered deep and perhaps unconscious determinants of self-expression which could not be made manifest in direct communication. All the methods used in the present study were informative but time consuming, and it required one and half to two hours for each participant.



### **6.3.4 Data analysis**

During data analysis and interpretation, various precautions were taken to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. This included that different methods of data collection were used, namely interviews and projective techniques. According to Reason and Rowan (1981), the use of more than one method of data collection could improve the credibility of the results. The data from the projective techniques was analysed according to the theoretical principles inherent in these techniques, but also enquiring into and using the meanings that the children themselves attached to their drawings. In addition to similarities between the participants, the unique experiences of each participant were also given recognition. The interpretation was done taking the context in which the study was conducted, into consideration, including the cultural meanings attached to aspects such as marriage, the clear division between children and adults, and other aspects.

## **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations focus on preventative and remedial measures, pertaining to the relevant parties involved. These recommendations are based on both the present study, and relevant aspects from the literature, and include: the child support system, social support and counselling for couples and fatherless children, and teenage pregnancies.

### **6.4.1 Child support**

Child support is related to the economic aspects discussed in the previous paragraph. The law must ensure that fathers take financial responsibility of their offspring and that the level of child support is adequate. Legislation is needed to ensure that the court orders for child support use an appropriate formula to ensure that the child receives sufficient money for survival. It must make sure the money is regularly collected from uncooperative parents.

However, court orders should not be the only intervention. Programs must be implemented to motivate and encourage fathers to support their children willingly. It must not only be law enforcement, but it must also help or teach the fathers the importance of providing support for their children. This should include financial, emotional, physical and moral support. The



fathers must be taught that they must consider the well-being of their children regardless of whether the mother is married to someone else or not.

The programs must also involve highlighting the effect that father absence has on children, so that the fathers will understand what is going on in the lives of their children, and realise their responsibilities in this regard. They must also be advised that they have the right to quit an unhappy marriage or relationship, but they do not have the right to deprive their children of care and financial support.

The programs should also be directed at the women to make them aware of their rights and to encourage them to claim child support. However, this should take cultural beliefs and values into consideration.

#### **6.4.2 Social support network and counselling**

Family, friends, institutions such as schools, community agencies and government services can serve as a source of support, by providing resources or fulfilling the role of a 'surrogate parent' (Prater, 1995). Friends and relatives may provide fatherless children with a healthy social and family environment and, if possible, material provisions such as clothes and food. The schools may also provide them with guidance about education and job hunting.

Scanzoni (in Gunard, 1982) suggests that marriage should be built around the efforts of both partners as co-achievers and co-providers and not solely around the effort of the husband or a wife. The partners should share a desire for flexibility and freedom in marriage and deep mutual friendship. People must be made aware of marriage counselling and couples should be encouraged to make use of these services.

Mead (in Gunard, 1982) suggests that the public could be made aware of matters related to marriage and marriage counselling through nation-wide discussions in magazines, newspapers and television. Through these media, people who are happily married can help those who are not and provide new ideas about what could be done to succeed in marriage.

Rucci (in Gunard, 1982) points out that children who do the best after their parents' divorce are those whose parents spend time with them, who make them feel loved and wanted in each home, who do not involve the children in the conflict in a manner that they have to take sides, and allow the children independent relationships with each of them.

Potgieter (1986) posits that psychologists and social workers must be involved to give children from divorced families the opportunity to air their problems, for example in workshops, and to endeavour to find possible solutions to unhappiness at home. The children must also be taught that they need not feel responsible for the problems of their parents, and help them minimise the pain and sufferings that the children experience during their parents' divorce.

### **6.4.3 Teenage pregnancies**

The focus here will be how to help teenage mothers and how to prevent teenage pregnancy.

Prater (1995) contends that the best strategy to deal with teenage pregnancies is to establish programs aimed at supporting personal self-esteem and social acceptance in teenage mothers, rather than spend time and energy to criticise and discuss how they have ruined their lives. They cannot change their past but they can focus on the future in a positive way, if they get support from the community.

They still have much potential to develop themselves, no matter what happened to their lives. They can still attain their goals if the society focuses on helping them reaching their destiny. The help must not only focus on the young mothers, but their children also need support to adjust to their living environment.

Programs can be implemented to prevent teenage pregnancy. This may take different forms. The schools, the church, and the community can play an important role in this regard. The teachers at school may provide sex education and highlight the disadvantages of involving in sexual intercourse at an early stage. These include the danger of contracting venereal diseases and AIDS, and having unplanned children and how that could affect people's lives.

The church plays an important role in enhancing morality among its members, based on the word of God. It is important for the church to implement youth programs that will help in teaching about sexual matters. Some churches prohibit sex before marriage and that also plays an important role in reducing teenage pregnancy.

The community also can establish youth clubs where the youth could be advised about future careers and how to deal with the challenges they have to face. Attitudes regarding education, guidance regarding sexual behaviour, opportunities for participation in sport, and leadership skills could be attended to in these youth clubs.



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