

# **The effect of mothers' studying on family life: A Case Study**

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# **The effect of mothers' studying on family life: A Case Study**

by

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## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to my late parents  
whom I know are always nearby.

My beloved mother who passed on in the last few months of this study, Mom you taught me the power of a praying mother and I know that from where you are, you continue to pray for me, thank you always.

## Acknowledgements

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*"All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel Mother."*  
-- Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

This study was borne out of a statement made by my youngest son, Jeevadh, then aged four: "I hate your studies"

To my God, the Source of all there is, I would never have survived the last few months of this study without Your love and without Your blessings. I am forever grateful for this journey and for all that I have come through with grace.

- ❖ To my supervisor, Dr Ruth Mampane who patiently waited for the motivation to return so I would continue with this study and then gave me unwavering support and inspiration to complete this study. I am eternally grateful to you.
- ❖ To the brave family who invited me into their home and who willingly shared their story with me. There is light at the end of the tunnel and you will reap the benefits of your sacrifice.
- ❖ To my husband Ashvan, your motivation and encouragement to strive for the best in both my academic and career aspirations has helped me to be where I am today. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity and the means to develop myself.
- ❖ To my sons, Khavaand and Jeevadh, for the sacrifice and understanding when I could not be with you, for your interest and always enquiring about how it was going with my studies.
- ❖ To my late mom, my sister and my niece, who helped with taking care of the boys whilst I was busy studying from when they were still very young.
- ❖ To my friends Patience and Louw, who provided the space for me to pursue my education, thank you for your support and for your motivation.
- ❖ Thank you to Adrie Van Dyk and Letittia Greenberg for the technical and language editing respectively.

I humbly acknowledge my Higher Self, for allowing me to let go  
and to Believe so I could flourish.

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## Declaration of Authenticity

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I, Prameshvarie Mooloo (student number 04165500) hereby declare that this study entitled:

The effect of mothers' studying on family life: A case study.

is my own work and that all references appear in the list of references. This thesis was not previously submitted by me for any degree at another university.

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Prameshvarie Mooloo

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Date

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## Abstract

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Despite the increase in the number of non-traditional students, there seem to be limited research in the area of adult women learners, especially mothers, who engaged in studies in the South African context. This study aimed to obtain insight into the effect a mother's studying has on family life. The researcher was keen to explore how a particular mother juggled multiple roles of mother, wife and student while engaged in academic studies. To delimit this research, work dynamics were not investigated and the focus was specifically on mothers who engaged in coursework where lectures may or may not be attended either part-time or full-time. This qualitative study employed a single case study design where a single family was purposively selected (n=4) and all ethical considerations of working with human participants, including children, in research were observed. The purpose of this study was clearly explained and the researcher obtained informed consent and assent before any data collection commenced. Semi-structured interviews were utilised as a data-collection technique. Data was transcribed from the recordings and from the data analysis the main themes which emerged were the family's experience on the mother's studying, the influence of studying on family relationships, roles within the family and forms of support experienced.

The findings show that the mother's studies affected family life due to the difficulty with integrating the multiple roles of student, spouse and mother. Despite the financial and relationship challenges, this study found that the mother enjoyed the support of her family, specifically her husband, and this seemed to enable her to pursue academic studies.

### Key concepts

- Family
- Non-traditional students
- Studies

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# Chapter 1

## Overview of the study

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women's rights and empowerment are clearly embedded in the constitution, yet, in certain societies, women are still expected to fulfil their traditional role (Knowles, Nieuwenhuis, & Smit, 2009). In general, it seems as if many women accept and fulfil their roles, duties, attitudes and behaviour as defined by society, which leads to the researcher's premise that balancing family life and studies is an enormous challenge. Therefore, the focus in this study was on the possible challenges and benefits mothers experience in completing their studies, and how family life might be affected positively and/or negatively.

Thus, this current study is an exploration of how family life is affected when the mother is engaged in academic studies. When engaging relevant literature on non-traditional students the juggling of multiple roles in the family unit emerged as a dominant feature relating to mothers who study. Therefore I concur with Reay (2003) who states that women often juggle work, childcare and household responsibilities with studying. Moss (2004) states that women entering higher education are constantly creating time and space for their studies, this study therefore documents mothers who pursue furthering their education, usually have to negotiate time with those around them, and family roles that take precedence due to gender expectation, while studies are left for last. To delimit this research, work dynamics were not investigated and the focus was specifically on mothers who engage in coursework where lectures are attended, sometimes during weekdays or weekends.

### 1.2 RATIONALE

This area of interest emerged from the researcher's own personal experience of undertaking studies, managing family responsibilities, and being employed full-time. As Walker (1998) succinctly points out, "in Black and White South African households, domestic obligations are shouldered by women." From this stemmed the researcher's need to understand how South African mothers juggle multiple roles in terms of childcare and domestic responsibilities while pursuing academic studies and the effect this situation was having on the family. The researcher was further intrigued to have found in the literature that support that non-traditional students need many different kinds of support and assistance from family, friends and institutions of higher learning. In a study conducted by Mallinckrodt and

Leong (1992), it was found that social support moderated the effect of stress for women, with more social support contributing to positive coping.

In research conducted by Taniguchi (2005), it was found that young children have a negative effect on women's completion of their degree. In addition, McBride (1990) maintains that children younger than 13 years old require more attention and experience more role conflicts involving school, and parenting demands were high. Similarly, in a study done by Home (1998), it was found that older children had a certain amount of independence, whereas students who care for young children experienced higher role conflict and demand. According to Rowlands (2010), students who are also parents face a unique challenge in returning to school, regardless of their marital status, and the age of their children could be a significant factor in role strain. In this sense, the researcher investigated role reversal and how the mother conceptualises her multiple roles as mother, wife and student while positioning herself as an individual with her own goals and aspirations. This study aimed to contribute to the knowledge base on the challenges mothers face as non-traditional students, the challenge of juggling multiple roles and the support structures that could contribute to positive outcomes for the mother.

### **1.3 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW**

In South Africa, it was found that the majority of learners in the higher education system are undergraduate students over the age of 23 years, and a significant number of them are working part-time or full-time and they have family responsibilities (Walters, & Koetsier, 2006). Buchler, Castle, Osman and Walters (2006) report that there is limited research on non-traditional students in higher education in South Africa. Walters and Koetsier (2006), argue that at systems level, there is a lack of insight into the push/pull factors for non-traditional students entering higher education, what motivates them to enter higher education, the barriers they experience, as well as their success and course completion rates at South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, Walters and Koetsier (2006) assert that there is a dire need to skill people in order to develop the economy and overcome social problems. Adults have a critical role to play in the development of South Africa because of their accumulated knowledge and experience. By means of education this knowledge can become socially useful.

Here reference is made to the study done by Scott, Burns and Cooney (1996) who state that because non-traditional students with children who return to study have a high motivation factor, their academic performance is also high. Likewise, Sanders and Bauer (1988) state that non-traditional students tend to be achievement oriented, highly motivated and

relatively independent. Seibert and Gilpin (1992, in Sanders, & Bauer, 1998) confirm this viewpoint that non-traditional students show high levels of motivation as well as attention to detail.

Furthermore, they have the ability to integrate new classroom information with life and work experiences. In this sense, life experiences can be seen as multifaceted in the light of non-traditional students' multiple roles and responsibilities (Walters, & Koetsier, 2006). Typically, these students commonly combine studies with other major life roles, such as work, family and community; hence, their dedication to the business of being a student is less exclusive.

Feminist literature refers to the multiplicity of women's roles and the "second shift" through the maintenance of children and home (Wolf-Wendel, & Ward, 2003, p.113, in Stone, 2008). Other research into the mature-age student experiences found that 'often a return to school creates significant role strain and feelings of guilt, inadequacy and self-blame over difficulties in handling multiple roles' Rice (1989, p.552, as cited in Scott et al., 1996). Furthermore, in the same study, it was found that role overload was one of the reasons why mothers gave up their studies. In contrast, many studies highlight the positive outcomes of managing multiple roles, resulting in "contentment and independence" (Helson, Elliot, & Leigh, 1990, p.159); "feelings of self-confidence, assertiveness, self-sufficiency and resourcefulness" (Vandewater, & Stewart, 1997, as cited in Louw-Potgieter, & Riordan, 2011, p.159).

Stone (2008) found that most non-traditional students face challenges with finances, lack of time, difficulty with organising and prioritising, dealing with changes in relationships with partners and children, balancing the needs of their studies with the needs of the family, home, partners and children. The decision for married women to pursue academic studies is not an easy one, especially if the husband is not happy about the wife pursuing academic studies. Leonard (1994, as cited in Stone, 2008) contributes to this notion when he stated that a third of the female non-traditional students who were interviewed, experienced significant conflict from their male partners regarding their decision to study.

Non-traditional students need many different kinds of support and assistance from family, friends and institutions of higher learning. Stone (2008) stated that students reported receiving assistance and support from a number of sources, particularly lecturers, support services on campus (such as counselling, learning support, career advisers, student mentors), partners, children and their own parents and fellow students. Louw-Potgieter and Riordan (2011) state that in South Africa, although women have care-giving responsibilities,



there are support structures available to them that assist with their care-giving duties. Examples of these structures include extended family networks (Makosana, 1997) or domestic help (Hertz, 2005). For the purpose of this research the term non-traditional student was used to refer to this group of students.

#### **1.4 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of the current study was to explore the effect of a mother's studying on family life. in her role as mother, wife and student. It was interesting to see how mothers who are engaged in academic studies made sense of their lives as they juggled competing demands of being a mother amongst their other roles.

#### **1.5 ASSUMPTIONS**

From the literature reviewed, the study was approached with the following assumptions:

- Family environments might be influenced both negatively and positively when mothers are engaged in academic pursuits (Ballmer, & Cozby, 1981).
- Support structures play a major role in the mother's educational attainment (Jacobs, & King, 2002).

### **6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To guide the research, the following research questions were asked.

#### **1.6.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION**

*How does mothers' studying affect family life?*

#### **1.6.2 SUB-QUESTIONS**

- ❖ How does the family experience the mother's studying?
- ❖ How does a mother's studying influence family relationships?
- ❖ How does a mother experience her multiple roles while studying?
- ❖ What are the forms of support for the mother while studying?

#### **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

For the purpose of this study the researcher chose the ecological theory as a theoretical framework.

### **1.7.1 THE ECOLOGICAL THEORY**

In this study the ecological theory of human development was used as a theoretical framework. The ecological theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), refers to the environment and the developing individual. In this case study the researcher drew on the development of the mother in relation to her academic studies as well as the developmental age of the children. The researcher also felt that the development phase of the children was very relevant to the research because age plays a pivotal role in the success of the mother's studies and the challenges she faces while pursuing academic studies.

Mampane (2010, p.13) states that the ecological environment is 'conceived as extending far beyond the immediate situation directly affecting the developing person,' so this theory was used from a phenomenological framework to highlight the interdependence of the relationships in the system. From the ecological theory the family is located within the microsystem, which is the system closest to the individual. During childhood the primary group for most children is the family. This explains why the family plays such a significant role in the development of the child. Children's early relationships with their mother and with significant other people, for example, friends and teachers, determine to a large extent their self-concept, feelings of security, and relationships with other people in general (Meyer, & Van Ede, 2003). Thus, when challenges occur in the family context, what effect, if any, does this have on the child? In a study conducted by Howes and Markman (1989) it was reported that when parents are able to handle differences in their relationships through proper conflict management and communication skills, it made a positive contribution to their children's well-being. However, men often respond to conflict and negative communication by withdrawing from their wives and children, in this sense it affects the development of the child's autonomy negatively (Howes, & Markman, 1989).

### **1.8 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

Through the readings the researcher found that the terms adult learners, adult students, non-traditional students, mature students have somewhat different meanings with each era (Galvin, 2006, cited in Benshoff, & Lewis, 1992; Bundy, 2004; Hadfield, 2003; Kasworm, 2003; Ogren, 2003). For the sake of this study, the researcher refers to this group of students as non-traditional students. First, a definition of a non-traditional student and some background of the history of non-traditional students are given, and then a discussion of the reason why this particular student population is growing so rapidly. In particular, I discuss key issues in the family which impact on mothers who are engaged in academic studies.

### **1.8.1 FAMILY**

The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995, p. 24) defines a family as the “smallest social unit in society consisting of a man and his wife, a man and his wife and child, a woman and child, usually under one roof. In this study, the family consisted of the father, the mother and children who all live together.

### **1.8.2 NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT**

In this study I refer to a non-traditional student as an adult who returns to school, either full-time or part-time, while maintaining responsibilities for family, employment, and other adult-life tasks. Galvin (2006, p.420) define a non-traditional student as a “student who is married, divorced, separated, or a parent, regardless of his or her age, race, degree, ethnicity or employment status at the time he or she enters college (e.g. right after high school or a 1-year delay from starting college and graduating high school)” (Bourgeois, Duke, Guyot and Merrill (1993, p.3).

### **1.8.3 STUDIES**

The Oxford Dictionary (2002, p.1143) defines studies as “the devotion of time and attention to acquiring knowledge, acquiring knowledge on”.

## **1.9. RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **1.9.1 CASE STUDY DESIGN**

A single case study research design was used in order to capture the influence of the mother’s studying, if any, on the family life. The researcher was of the opinion that a case study was most appropriate to answer the research question during data collection.

Denscombe (2003) describes case study as an in-depth study because of its ability to research just one instance so there is greater opportunity to delve deeper into things. According to Bromley (1990, in Maree 2008, p.75), case study research is a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. A typical characteristic of case studies is that it gives the researcher a holistic understanding of how participants in the study interact and relate to each other in a particular situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2008b). Furthermore, the case study research design answers how and why questions. Case studies open the possibility of giving a “voice to the powerless and voiceless”, for example, children who are the

marginalised group allowed me to delve deeply into their experiences of the mothers' studying and how they felt about it (Nieuwenhuis, 2008b, p. 75).

Stuurman (1999, p.103, in Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2007) states that case studies reveal that "human systems have a wholeness or integrity to them rather than being a loose connection of traits, necessitating in-depth investigation. Furthermore, contexts are unique and dynamic and case studies "investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance. In this sense, the researcher hoped to elicit from the family their opinion of what it was like for them to be in the situation where the mother was studying, and what their thoughts and feelings were in that situation. Cohen et al. (2007, p. 253) says that it is important in case studies for "events to speak for themselves, rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher".

There are several types of case studies. Yin (1984) identifies three such types in terms of their outcomes: exploratory (as a pilot to other studies or research questions), descriptive (providing narrative accounts) and explanatory (testing theories). Descriptive narrative accounts were used because the researcher was interested in the lived experiences and the stories of the family in this particular context.

The strength of the case study design is that it is very useful in that one can use a number of data collection techniques in order to answer the research question. Similarly, Denscombe (2003) states that a strength of the case study approach is that it allows for the researcher to use a variety of sources, a variety of types of data and a variety of research methods as part of the investigation.

Case studies, however, also have limitations; for example, the results may not be generalizable and may not be easily open to cross-checking, therefore they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective. Furthermore, there is always the problem of observer bias (Nisbet, & Watt, 1984).

### **1.9.2 META-THEORETICAL PARADIGM: INTERPRETIVISTIC PARADIGM**

In order to understand the family's subjective experience of the mother's studying, an interpretivist approach was followed. Cohen et al. (2007), make the point that the main feature of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of the human experience. Such an enquiry is concerned with understanding the world from within (Nieuwenhuis, 2008a). The reality of the family's experience takes place in a social context.

An understanding of the inner world of the family allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of their subjective experiences.

## **1.10 SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS**

In this research one family's experiences were explored. Lester (1999:1) asserts that the "phenomenological approach can be applied to single cases or deliberately selected samples. Therefore, the family that was purposively chosen by the researcher consisted of the father, mother, a son and a daughter. In accordance with qualitative research, the case (family) was determined by means of purposive and convenience sampling and the researcher proposed to use purposive sampling. According to Maree and Pietersen (2008), purposeful sampling is used in special situations where sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind. In this case, a family where the mother was pursuing undergraduate studies on a part-time basis at a correspondence institution was specifically identified. The children were school-going age; the son was 8 years old and the daughter was 12 years old.

## **1.11 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **1.11.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Mouton and Marais (1990, cited in Hood, 2008, p.51) define research methodology as "the explanation of the plan of how the researcher intends conducting the research. The qualitative study involved a family, and because qualitative methods are best suited to understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of participants, it allowed the researcher to understand the way in which this family in particular gave insight into their experiences of the mother's studies. The qualitative approach facilitated the collection of rich, detailed data from the participants because it offered participants an opportunity to provide in-depth views of their personal experiences which were contextually relevant.

The qualitative nature of this study alluded to phenomenology because the operative word in phenomenology is 'describe' rather than to explain (Lester, 1999). In this study the aim was to describe, as accurately as possible, the phenomenon, which was the influence the mother's studies had on family life. Through phenomenology this study intended to understand the lived experiences of the participants of the issue that was being explored. Phenomenologists are concerned with "understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (Welman, & Kruger, 1999, p. 189). To this extent, I wanted to know how the mother and family attended to their everyday lives while the mother

was engaged in academic studies. Lester (1999; p. 1) states that phenomenological approaches are located in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, the emphasis is on personal perspective and interpretation and is, therefore, powerful for “understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions”.

## **1.12 DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUES**

Case studies usually combine data generation methods such as interviews, questionnaires and observations. I generated data for my study by making use of semi-structured interviews, observation notes and a reflective journal.

### **1.12.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

Data in this study was generated by means of semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted in the participants’ home for their convenience, and lasted for a minimum of one hour and a maximum of four hours. Interviews were conducted with each family member separately. The reason for interviewing the family members separately from the mother was to allow them the freedom to voice their feelings freely without being intimidated by the mother’s presence. With the consent of the participants all interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and handwritten notes were used to support the recordings. Easton, McComish and Greenberg (2000) caution that equipment failure and environmental conditions are factors that might impede the research being undertaken. With this in mind, the researcher ensured that recording equipment was in working condition, that there were extra batteries and requested the mother to ensure that there would be no interruptions and background noise since the interviews took place in the natural setting, namely the participants’ home. The recording was useful for the transcriptions for analysis purposes. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in research projects to support data emerging from other data sources – in this case observations. Semi-structured interviews do not extend over a long time period and require that the participant should answer a set of predetermined questions. Probing and clarification of answers and the interview schedules basically define the line of inquiry (Nieuwenhuis, 2008b).

### **1.12.2 OBSERVATION NOTES**

Cohen et al. (2007) state that observation offers the researcher the opportunity to gather data as events occur, in other words “live” data. Observation within qualitative research allowed the researcher to gather data naturally as it was occurring. For instance, in this role, the researcher documented behaviours of the family, verbal behaviour and non-verbal

behaviour. The interactions that took place between the family members were also observed and this gave the researcher some insight into the family dynamics.

As with other data collection methods, the observation method has its own challenges in terms of validity and reliability. In order to overcome this challenge the researcher made quick, short notes during the interviews and soon after the interviews to avoid the possibility of forgetting valuable information. Furthermore, the researcher relied on reflexivity and consultation with her supervisor in order to moderate bias about how she was interpreting what she was observing.

### **1.12.3 REFLECTIVE JOURNAL**

Spradley (2001, p.71) points out: “A reflexive journal includes a record of participant’s experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs and problems. The summary of the mother’s journal was used in the study by obtaining permission from my participant first. In order to bracket personal thoughts on the topic, the researcher also made use of a diary. Groenewald (2004) cautions against researchers who become easily absorbed in the data-collection process and then fail to reflect on what is happening, and advises that the researcher should “maintain a balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes such as hunches, impressions, feelings and so on” Groenewald (2004:15). For this reason the researcher maintained a reflective journal to document all her experiences during the research process. Cohen et al. (2007) state that researchers are part of the social world they are researching and therefore bring with them their own perception, biases, roles and any other matters that might impact on the research process. In order to remain true to the process of reflexivity, Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that researchers should acknowledge and disclose themselves. Throughout the data-generation process, it was important for the researcher to reflect on what her role was so that she could understand her part and her influence on the study. In reflecting her own experiences as a mother, wife and student, the process of reflexivity allowed her to separate her personal views and preconceptions from the phenomenon under study Beukes (2010).

### **1.13 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The family or case was determined by purposive sampling which is in accordance with the purpose the researcher had in mind for this study. Purposive sampling is used in situations where the researcher has a specific purpose in mind, for instance a nucleus family was purposively selected for this study (Maree, & Pietersen, 2008). Lester (1999) states that the ‘problem’ with phenomenological research is that it generates a large quantity of interview

notes, tape recordings and field notes which have to be analysed. Nieuwenhuis (2008c, p. 100) states that when analysing qualitative data the “goal is to summarise what has been seen or heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that would aid in understanding and interpreting that which is emerging. The researcher was aware that qualitative data consists of words and observations and therefore her aim was to interpret and make sense of what was in the data. She first read through the data to get a feel for what was being said (Lester, 1999). She also had to keep in mind constantly the research questions that guided the study that had to be answered, as well as the aims and objectives of the study. For these reasons the researcher intended to use thematic analysis which was carried out by means of identifying possible themes from the transcriptions by way of coding. As a mode of analysis, it suggested a way of understanding or making meaning of textual data.

#### **1.14 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF MY RESEARCH**

##### **❖ Trustworthiness (Reliability/Dependability)**

The term trustworthiness refers to the way in which the inquirer is able to persuade the audience that the findings in the study are worth paying attention to and that the research is of high quality (Cohen et al. 2007). The dependability of this study was improved through member checking and the transcripts were provided to participants for proofreading in order to ensure that they were accurate Cohen et al. (2007).

##### **❖ Credibility**

The credibility of the study was improved by verifying the data with my participants in order to ensure that the correct interpretations had been made. In doing so, at the end of the interview the researcher sounded her understanding of what had been said to verify whether her interpretation of what had been said was correct. Furthermore, at the end of my transcription participants were allowed to comment and evaluate the transcript by means of member checking (Nieuwenhuis, 2008b).

##### **❖ Transferability**

Transferability of my study was improved by not generalising the findings to the wider population (Cohen et al. 2007). I used various data collection methods, for example, semi-structured interviews, observation notes and reflective journal.



## **1.15 MY ROLE AS THE RESEARCHER**

The role of the researcher was to gather data, transcribe and analyse data. After analysing the data, the results were documented in order to present the findings. Because the researcher was aware of the fact that her own subjectivity was included in the research process, the results were forwarded to the participants in this study to allow them the opportunity to tell their own story without bias. The researcher reflected in her research journal and with her supervisor to counter possible bias. The observation notes contained specific observations she made during the interviews as well as any other information provided by participants during the research process.

## **1.16 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

### **1.16.1 INFORMED CONSENT, INFORMED ASSENT AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

In order to adhere to ethical considerations, the purpose of this research was discussed with the participants and informed consent was received to conduct the research. Permission was sought from the parents to interview the children. Informed consent was also obtained from the children. In the face-to-face interview, a letter was presented to the mother and father to sign. Participants were reminded that they may withdraw at any time if they wished to do so. Ethical clearance was also received from the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria, certifying that the study was ethically sound.

### **1.16.2 PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

Cohen et al. (2007) state that the dissemination of information is the ability to match personal information with the identity of the participants in the study. Thus, the researcher and the participants had to be clear about the confidentiality of results and that the family's identities would not be disclosed in order to protect the privacy of the family. Although the children chose pseudonyms, results were presented in an anonymous way so that identities were protected to further ensure anonymity. In the case of the reflective journal that the mother kept, the researcher had gained permission to use the notes in the journal in this study. The participant had been given the assurance that the notes from the diary would be kept safely at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years.

### **1.16.3 PROTECTION FROM HARM**

The researcher understood that, in order to gain in-depth information, she would have to establish a good level of rapport and empathy with participants (Lester, 1999) and was

therefore at all times respectful and sympathetic towards the participants. She also informed the participants that debriefing was available should the need arise.

## **1.17 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

The chapter presents the background of the study, the literature review, theoretical framework, rationale and the purpose of the study and research design. This chapter is concluded by focusing on the methodology section and the ethical considerations relating to this study.

### **CHAPTER TWO**

In this chapter, relevant literature on the experiences of the influence of studying women, non-traditional students, particularly mothers who study, is reviewed. The ecological theory was applied to the literature consulted.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

This chapter outlines the methodological processes followed. Research approach, design and data collection process are discussed, and the chapter is concluded with an outline of the data analysis process in this study.

### **CHAPTER FOUR**

In this chapter, the findings in this study as discussed in chapter two are discussed by means of the theoretical framework and thematic analysis.

### **CHAPTER FIVE**

This chapter provides the conclusion by focusing on the main findings, limitations, contributions and recommendations for future findings.

## 1.18 CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes with an integration of the findings, the current study is aligned within the broad context of literature in order to provide answers and insight to the main research question. This chapter concludes with limitations, recommendations and concluding comments emerging from this study.

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## Chapter 2

### Literature review and theoretical framework

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#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study is based on the premise that human life can only be understood from within (Nieuwenhuis, 2008) and, as such, subjective experiences and interpretation of those experiences are affected by context (Hood, 2008). Thus, in order to understand the way in which this particular family in the current study experiences the mother's studies, it is necessary to explore the context in which they develop. Therefore, a brief outline of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1994) is applied to theoretically frame this study.

From the literature that was reviewed, it seems that non-traditional students, specifically mothers, occupy multiple roles such as wife, mother and worker (Hughes, 2002). In this chapter, literature on non-traditional students is examined with a focus on mothers who study, and how their multiple roles as mother, wife and student affect family life.

In research the literature review is important because it reveals other or similar research related to the topic and highlights areas of research that can be explored. The literature review begins with a discussion of the definition of non-traditional, adult or mature learner/student. This leads to a discussion of the background of this student population, followed by a clarification of themes unearthed in the review of literature. In summary, the research literature on adult students, specifically mothers, and how they typically divide themselves between the multiple roles they hold as they navigate their way around finding time and space for studies, is reviewed.

#### 2.2 DEFINITION OF NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

So, who are non-traditional students? From the literature, there seems to be a great deal of debate on what it means to be an adult student. Different terms are used to describe this student population; sometimes reference is made to "non-traditional" or "part-time" students, adult students, re-entry students or returning students, mature adults, mature-age students. When examining the above terms, an interesting observation is the term "re-entry" and "returning" as opposed to "entering" or "first-time entry students. It follows that the term "entering" or "first-time entry students" is synonymous with school leavers who enrol at university directly after matric, whereas "re-entry" and "returning" are used to describe a student population who delay from entering college or university directly after matric and this

will be explored later. For the purpose of this study, this student population will be referred to as non-traditional students.

Research done by Galvin (2006, p.420) define a non-traditional student as a “student who is married, divorced, separated, or a parent, regardless of his or her age, race, degree, ethnicity or employment status at the time he or she enters college (e.g. right after high school or a 1-year delay from starting college and graduating high school)” (Bourgeois, Duke, Guyot and Merrill (1993, p.3). These students are often referred to as adult students, re-entry students or returning students.

Hadfield (2003) states that non-traditional students are working adults, some are unemployed adults and their ages range from 25 to 80. Some have not been in education for 20 years while others have recently completed an associate degree. Some are engineers, nurses, secretaries, chief executive officers, teachers, parking lot attendants, dog walkers, exotic dancers, immigrants, professionals changing careers, individuals wanting to develop themselves, parents, single parents or grandparents.

Situating the definition of a non-traditional student within a global context, Trueman and Hartley (1996) state that in the United Kingdom, students over the age of 21 are called “mature” students; in Australia, those over 25 are called “mature-age” students; in the USA, those older than 22 are called “non-traditional” or “adult-students”; and in Canada, such students are called “mature students. In South Africa, the current legislative definition of the “mature-age” student is someone who is 23 years or older. This means that, from the age of 23, these are students who can obtain mature-age exemption, which gives them access to higher education. Walters and Koetsier (2006) maintain that 50% of students in the South African higher education system are over the age of 23, 80% of which are at undergraduate level, and they work either full-time or part-time and have family responsibilities.

### **2.3 BACKGROUND OF NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS**

Walker (1998) states that in South Africa, there is significant gap in literature related to the experiences of non-traditional women students in higher education. Walters and Koetsier (2006) report that there is a long history of non-traditional students in South Africa, but it is largely undocumented. It is only in recent years that attention has been given to them for educational research. This notion is consistent with Plageman (2011) who posits that non-traditional students are often not included in institutions’ statistics because of their part-time status; therefore, it is difficult to obtain information on them. Moreover, Ricco, Sabet and Clough (2009) found that, specifically female non-traditional students with children (mothers)

have received limited attention in psychological and educational literature. The dearth of literature on female non-traditional students leaves an unclear picture of who they really are.

From the studies done, it was found that the non-traditional student's population is growing worldwide and many of them are mothers (Home, 1998; Mottarella, Fritsche, Whitten, & Bedsole, 2009). For example, White (2008, p.160) maintains that many students in New Zealand are "now of mature age, female and mothers of dependent children. Kasworm (2006) stated that 53% of college students are either married, single parents or divorced and goes on to say that this figure is likely to increase in the next decade. Bannister (2009) contends that according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) the number of enrolments of non-traditional students from 2005 to 2016 is likely to increase by 21%. In Australia, the non-traditional student population is significantly high, in fact, Cullity (2006) states that 38% of the student population is over the age of 21.

It is important to have an understanding of why non-traditional students return to studying. Plageman (2011) states that when an adult female undergraduate student enrolls in studies there is typically a reason why she did not enrol or complete higher education directly after matric as traditional students do. Some of the reasons provided relate to the historical period in which she was raised, family values, cultural and family expectations, individual perceptions.

Kasworm (2003) posits that key life transitions and changes are possible reasons why non-traditional students are influenced to pursue studies. For instance, key life transitions could relate to divorce, children entering school, which means free time for the mother, changes in job situation or even job loss. Taniguchi and Kaufman (2007) state that new parents who envisage the cost implications associated with providing their families with decent lives could be a motivating factor for them to return to studies. Furthermore, empty nest syndrome, self-fulfilment and the need for independence were also found to be possible reasons for enrolling in higher education (Stiles, 2007).

Chao and Good (2004) believe that if more research is done on why non-traditional students return to college and their perspectives on college experience, such information would be useful for counselling professionals to better meet their needs and for institutions to recognise their social responsibility to deliver education to all students. However, Hadfield (2003) criticises the institutions programmes because they continue to deliver a "one-size-fits-all" product and service to all students despite the diverse needs of non-traditional students.

## 2.4 BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

It seems that when non-traditional students make the decision about whether or not to enrol in studies, the issue of barriers plays a significant role in making the decision (Burton, Lloyd, & Griffiths, 2011). The authors go on to say that many barriers continue to exist even after the decision has been made to enter university and exert a certain amount of pressure on the individual. Although there have been an increasing number of adult students attending college in recent decades, the low completion throughput rates of these non-traditional students are alarming (Taniguchi, 2005). In a study by McGivney (2004) on completion patterns between female and male adult students, they found that male and female students had different reasons for not completing their degree. For instance, men cited course-related, finance-related, or work-related reasons for not completing their degree, whereas women cited family commitments.

Other barriers to completion of studies for adult women are the age of her children, lack of support by spouse/partner or other family members, lack of study time, and part-time enrolment status (Jacobs, & King, 2002; Kasworm, 2003; Leavitt, 1989; McGivney, 2004). Similarly, McGivney (1990, & 1999) puts it differently; reference is made to situational and institutional barriers that relate to family and personal situations. These categorisations are consistently supported by Cross (1981), Maxted (1999), and Davies, Osborn, and Williams (2002). They also mention similar groupings such as dispositional, family and personal, socio-economic, financial and institutional and organisational factors. For instance, in the case of family and personal barriers, non-traditional students are more likely to be married and have children (Western, McMillan, & Durrington, 1998), which could result in financial and time demands, which, in turn, could hinder a student's academic success (Taniguchi, & Kaufman, 2005). In fact, when examining challenges experienced by non-traditional adult female students, time management seemed to feature extensively. In this sense, Vryonides and Vitsilakis (2008) posit that having an understanding around the social conditions, such as the home, is necessary when examining the lives of non-traditional students. They say that these adult students often study at home and that means studying has to be integrated with domestic responsibilities within specific time frames in conjunction with pre-existing roles. In fact, in a study done by Edwards (1993, p.65) women reported that they were unable to meet all the commitments of education and family due to lack of time as it appeared "the amount of time that both seemed to require appeared never-ending. There is no doubt that when women are seeking educational attainment, time management becomes a crucial skill for balancing multiple roles to ultimately achieve academic success. Similarly, Davies (2001) contends that barriers such as economic and family responsibilities can lead to attrition.

Dispositional barriers relate to the difficulties students experience when they are not fully prepared for higher education learning (Ozga, & Sukhnandan, 1998; Haggis, & Pouget, 2002, in Burton et al., 2011, p.26). These students could benefit from institutions who have learning support in the education system to assist them in their educational pursuit. On the other hand, institutional and organisational barriers refer to policies and procedures that have “unintentional negative facets” (Burton et al., 2011, p.27), such as timetabling, course information and guidance. Thus, as a result of the complex lives non-traditional students have in trying to juggle multiple roles, having flexible timetables will allow these students an opportunity to better plan their lives and commitments ahead of time.

## **2.5 RETENTION**

Non-traditional students have the potential to succeed at university if there are relevant support structures in place; however, according to Tones, Fraser, Elder and White (2009), limited research has been done on the support structures of and retention strategies for this student population. Retention is a key measure of a university's effectiveness. Mortiboys (2002) states that if universities have an understanding of the process and dynamics of educational attainment, retention strategies as well as student success might improve

According to Trotter and Cove (2005) the first year in a student's university career is a critical determinant for persistence. Bannister (2009) states that non-traditional students have challenges with employment, family responsibilities and other time demands, thus, it is likely that all these challenges may influence a non-traditional student's decision to withdraw from studies. Trotter and Cove (2005) contend that institutions need to be aware of the challenges that non-traditional students face because of the competing demands placed on them. Lundberg (2003) posits that non-traditional students are not always willing to seek help in making the transition to university. Therefore, most universities have orientation programmes as a way of integrating students to the university thereby bridging the gap between university support structures and non-traditional students.

Hadfield (2003) states that institutions need to investigate the ways in which they attract and retain non-traditional students. In a study by Lundberg (2003), on student retention and learning, it was found that the quality of relationships between university administrators and non-traditional students was shown to be a contributing factor in learning. The study suggests that when non-traditional students experienced university support staff as helpful, considerate and flexible, they were able to learn more. In this way, non-traditional student retention was influenced by increased learning. Bannister (2009) states that at many



universities and colleges, academic assistance centers, career and employment services and financial assistance is utilized as a means of fostering learning in order to retain students. She goes on to say that retention occurs because of the universities ability to create a conducive environment and a positive involvement in learning.

Hadfield (2003) offers an alternative perspective on possible ways of retaining non-traditional students. He suggests that institutions should look at how leaders in the corporate world achieve excellence for customer service. Non-traditional students see themselves as customers, they shop around before they make a decision about which institution to enrol at, they pay highly, sometimes from their own pocket, for their academic learning, and when they are not satisfied with the service they receive at one institution they simply transfer to another. "Bad service" is demonstrated in a number of ways, for example, most non-traditional students have day jobs so they are likely to attend evening or weekend classes depending on the programme offerings. When they are on campus, all administrative offices are closed. If these students wish to make use of support services or if they have queries regarding their student accounts, they will most likely have to take time off from work to attend to these matters. The message that these students get is that they are not "real" students. Bannister (2009) posits that support services should be maintained in order to provide a nurturing environment for academic achievement.

Good customer service is demonstrated in a number of ways (Hadfield 2003), for instance, Malcolm Knowles, the "father" of adult education refers to non-traditional students as 'self-directing'. This implies that self-directing students enrol at institutions with specific "goals, expectations, learning objectives for the time, energy and money they invest" (Hadfield, 2003, p.21). Therefore, the traditional pedagogic model of dependent recipient does not benefit the non-traditional student. Thus, when developing programmes and courses, collaboration with this student population can enhance educational institutions' programme offerings. Added to this is the fact that non-traditional students already have much work and life experience and institutions can benefit from this by integrating students' prior knowledge and skills into curriculum development. In this way non-traditional students are given recognition for prior learning and they might feel valued and respected. Accordingly, institutions should also keep abreast of developments in job markets, businesses and industries, and develop programmes to fill the gaps in the skills and knowledge of students. Obviously, this will mean having competent lecturers who are effective and have up to date knowledge of what is happening in the world. Time is a valuable commodity to the non-traditional student, they must find the learning experience meaningful and not a waste of their time. When they complain, institutions must listen to their complaints and then make

the necessary effort to improve on their services. If institutions focus on how they treat their non-traditional students and improve on their customer service initiatives, enrolment and retention of non-traditional students are likely to be enhanced, which has benefits for the institution itself. In doing so, the academic experience and success of non-traditional students are likely to increase.

When customer service is good, students go out and talk about the good service they receive. This could relate to the efficient registration processes or to teaching staff, and in this way, by word of mouth, they relate their experiences to other prospective students. Other customer service strategies such as flexible office hours for non-traditional students, child-care centres, parking spaces when these students rush from work to campus, social activities that include families, are a few strategies that could be used to make the non-traditional student's life a bit easier while they focus on academic achievement. Bannister (2009) suggests extended office, restructuring support services to students and providing staff with the necessary skills training in order to improve service delivery.

Therefore, if completion and retention policies are not properly instituted to provide some kind of buffer against the array of other barriers that adult students face, academic success becomes more and more difficult to achieve. Institutions should focus on how they treat their non-traditional students and improve on their customer services initiatives, then enrolment and retention of non-traditional students are likely to be enhanced with the accompanying benefits for the institution itself. In doing so, the academic experience and success of non-traditional students are likely to increase.

## **2.6 MULTIPLE ROLES OF NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS**

### **2.6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Burton et al. (2011, p.31) posit that non-traditional students are not a homogeneous group due to the responsibilities and many life roles they occupy. When examining research on adult female students, specifically mothers, life roles seemed to be a recurring theme. According to Plageman (2011) the life roles that non-traditional students occupy include spouse/partner, mother, daughter, worker and student. Despite the multiple life roles a woman may have, "one of the foundational roles a woman may have is that of being a mother" (Plageman, 2011, p73). Even today, most women live interesting and challenging lives outside their home; however, once a woman becomes a mother, most of them redefine their own sense of self in terms of their new role as mother and this takes preference over the sense of self (Knowles, Nieuwenhuis, & Smit, 2009). Forna (1999, as cited in Knowles et

al., 2009, p.339) states that, “the moment a mother sacrifices her own identity, she is likely to experience such powerful feelings as depression, guilt, rejection, exhaustion, jealousy, frustration, irritability, inadequacy, tension, abandonment, stress, conflict and isolation. This would explain Pillay’s (2007, p.1) statement that “motherhood is probably the only job from which one can rarely, if ever resign, once you are a mother it is a done deal and there is no turning back. All in all, mothers find themselves having multiple roles and therefore they are involved in more than one system. As she navigates herself between these different systems, she is confronted with conflict. A possible reason for this could be role expectations associated with role responsibilities. For instance, Jackman (1999) states that family and community members tend to sanction role responsibilities that are associated with wife and mother, whereas other roles such as worker or student may or may not receive the same level of endorsement.

Adebayo (2006) posits that when engaging in multiple roles that are incompatible, role strain and role conflict are the result. The aim of the researcher was to gain an understanding of how the mother in the current study manages studying and family roles, and the possible inter-role conflict this has on the family life. Role strain consists of two overlapping terms, role overload and role conflict (Adebayo, 2006). Role strain is defined as a “felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations” (Goode, 1960, p.483) and in this case role strain will occur when there is the expectation that the mother must perform well in all her roles.

## **2.6.2 ROLE OVERLOAD**

Role overload occurs when one attempts to satisfy the demands of some roles at the expense of other role expectations in the midst of time constraints (Greenhaus, & Beutell, 1985, in Adebayo, 2006). It follows that role overload leads to role conflict only when the demands of one of the multiple roles make it difficult to fulfil the demands of another role and no alternative mechanisms exist to help persons to fulfil their various roles adequately. In a study by Scott et al. (1996) on mature student attrition, which is relevant here, it was found that role overload was one of the reasons why mothers discontinued their studies. Walker (1998) contends that “in Black and White South African households, domestic obligations are shouldered by women. Contrary to this finding, Makosana (1997) and Hertz (2005, in Riordan and Louw-Potgieter, 2011) maintain that in South African households, although women have care-giving responsibilities, there are support structures available to assist them, for example extended families and domestic help. In this regard, although there are various sources of support available, this support may not necessarily be found in a single system only.

### 2.6.3 ROLE CONFLICT

Role conflict is defined as simultaneous, incompatible demands from two or more sources (Home, 1998). For example Home (1998 in Rowlands, 2010, p.19) found that role conflict was most pronounced between student and parenting roles, it seems “family and student work just never ends”.

This was documented by Wiebe and Harvey (1997) in their description of mothers and students: cited in Plageman and Sabina (2010, p.157),

*As students entered university, the addition of student role to the demands of other areas of life caused the greatest unease. Strains were related to decreased time for family and friends, decreased organisation of home and personal activities, demands and household tasks, and issues related to child care. Most strain, however, occurred in coping with the demands of the university itself.*

This quote clearly expresses some of the major challenges and potential family influences that may often be felt by female adult undergraduate students who decide to return to school.

On the other hand, it has been shown that multiple roles are valuable for various reasons. For example, multiple opportunities can provide for experiencing success and an overall sense of personal well-being. Riordan and Louw-Potgieter (2011) make the point that managing multiple roles can result in women feeling a sense of contentment and independence. Similarly, Kopp and Ruzizka (1993), and Plageman, (2011) concur that women who have a number of life roles tend to be happier. However, despite the satisfaction a woman may have with multiple roles, balancing all these roles remains a problem. The sharing of the role of being a student between mother and child can also strengthen the relationship between mothers and children. In particular, I refer to a study done by Suito, Plikuhn, Gilligan and Powers (2008) who found that mothers’ enrolment had positive effects on their children’s educational aspirations and outcomes; however, what was significant was that the mothers themselves had to complete their studies successfully in order to make any impact. In other words, mothers who are role models are required to be successful (Christopher, 2005; Dyk, 1987, in Ricco et al., 2009). It makes logical sense that, if a mother can impact her own educational attainment she is likely to influence her children’s attitudes towards school as well. Furthermore, in the same study by Suito et al. (2008) the authors report that the mother’s educational success had equal effect on both sons and daughters thus gender differences was of no consequence as far as the effect of the mothers return to studies had on the children.

To summarise, it seems as if the literature suggests that choosing the role of wife, mother or student brings a mixture of self-enhancing rewards as well as new demands, and all these depend on how the mother perceives them.

## **2.7 RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE FAMILY**

### **2.7.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the literature review, having an understanding of definitions is important for contextualising the study. This study is concerned with family, therefore the researcher consulted various sources of literature on families in order to derive a definition of family, which made sense to her. Fine (1993, cited in Sherriff, Seedat, & Suffla, 2010, p.23) posit that “there is no single correct definition of what a family is. However, authors like Amoateng and Richter (2004, in Sherriff et al., 2010, p.23) argued that there is a general consensus in defining families as: “social groups that are related by blood (kinship), marriage, adoption, or affiliation with close emotional attachments to each other that endure over time and go beyond a particular physical residence”.

Interestingly, the term “family” and “the family” did not emerge as having the same meaning. Holstein and Gubrium (1999) posit that these two terms are very different. “Family” as explained by these authors, refers to the social form of family and implies the social relationships that families have with each other in terms of day-to-day interactions, how they view themselves and are viewed by others, the changes or fluidity in families and family structures that transpire over time. On the other hand, “the family” is significantly different in that it looks at family in a more general sense as though “it is an actual entity”, so there are no personal overtures and will thus not include the changes that are produced as a result of everyday living (Plageman, 2011, p.55). Given the ways in which families go about their daily lives, the use of the term “family” in this study will allow for an interpretive perspective of how this particular family in the current study makes sense of their experiences with the mother’s studies through their relations with each other.

Shaw and Lee (2009, cited in Plageman, 2010, p.385) define family as: “The social unit where most people are raised, learn systems of belief, experience love and perhaps abuse and neglect, and generally grow to be a part of social communities. It is in the family where most of us internalize messages about ourselves, about others, and about our place in the world. Taken together, these definitions describe families as social systems with strong emotional bonds. I refer to the latter definition because of its emphasis on the social milieu, it places the individual within the ecological system and shows its interrelatedness and

interconnectedness throughout the systems. In essence, if family systems are healthy and individuals' basic needs are met, then society as a whole will be influenced.

I refer to a quote from Boughner, Davis and Mims (1998, cited in Plageman, 2010, p.30) who state that "family life is a tapestry of intertwined stories" (p.13) and each family creates stories about "how to be a family, how to love, how to work, what is worthwhile" (p.14). Plageman (2010) in her study uses the analogy of a family tapestry because of its symbolism of the interconnectedness, the symbolism of the tapestry fits well with the ecological theory which I will use to frame this study. This interconnectedness can be found between family members, day-to-day interactions of individuals, the changes in the household as a result of having a non-traditional student, the institution where the mother is enrolled at, the parents' workplace, all have to be in-grained into the family. Thus, when an adult learner decides to continue with education it is not an individualised process, as Plageman (2011, p.51) succinctly puts it, "it is the culmination of much thought and deliberation. In addition, she goes on to say that family members and close friends are most likely to affect the non-traditional student on a daily basis and therefore it makes sense that their influence will affect educational attainment. Plageman (2011) further states that attending college requires time, money, access, ability and desire. The researcher agrees with this notion of family influence, because for a non-traditional student, studying will become part of everyday functioning of the family. Thus, the mother's studying will have a profound effect on the family. In terms of relationships between family members, the family environment, communication patterns and the level of support a non-traditional student will ultimately influence her educational attainment.

Another factor which is likely to effect the mother's decision to study is the issue of timing. Plageman and Sabina (2010) state that the timing of re-entry female students is dependent on the needs of the family. In this regard, adult women students will examine life course of the family which are related to family needs and the level of support she is likely to receive from family members. Mohny and Anderson (1988) found that female undergraduate students reported that they wanted to believe that their decision to return to studying would not adversely affect their family in terms of caring for them and the responsibility they had towards them. As this research study specifically focuses on the effect the mother's studies has on family, literature that emphasised the family's influence or effect on the mother's educational attainment was consulted. Additionally, relevant studies related to support structures were also explored.

Crittenden's (2001) view is that family space is actually "emotional labour", which follows a mother no matter where she goes. Crittenden (2011) goes on to say that the home is "rarely a place where women put their feet up and unwind" (cited in Pillay, 2007, p.31). The researcher concurs with this notion, because taking care of a family is hard work and the physical work that goes into caretaking also requires emotional energy and this kind of labour or effort is required on a full-time basis.

### **2.7.2 MOTHERHOOD AS A RESPONSIBILITY**

There are two other terms which need clarification, mother and motherhood. According to Coontz and Parson (1997, p.440, cited in Riekert, 2005, p.44), the term "mother" "has been an all-purpose verb, through which complex systems of economic, political and social activities were depicted as an ideal expression of love. This implies that the mother is central in the home and activities revolve around her.

In South Africa, across the racial lines, most women are compelled to work due to economic reasons. Thus, the mother's role in society has changed and still continues to do so. Moreover, the South African Constitution addresses discrimination based on sex roles and stereotyping (Ichou, 2006). Today, doors are open to women and they choose interesting career paths where they make valuable contributions in the labour market. This is not to say that societal expectations and attitudes about the role of a mother have simply disappeared. Beck (1997 in Knowles, et al., 2009) asserts that society defines different characteristics and this is found in the different roles that men and women hold, these beliefs are rigidly enshrined in individuals and cannot be changed easily. Duncan and Barlow (2002) posit that "society has therefore never truly viewed women as individual citizens endowed by the constitution with inalienable rights because they are to carry out traditional role expectations, despite the requirements of a modern economy. This contradiction is what leads mothers to redefine their mother role and because there is no escape from society's expectation of what it means to be a 'good mother', mothers invariably find themselves under pressure with the balancing act of these idealised dual roles.

The term "motherhood" has been defined differently by various theorists. A comparison is made between radical feminism and African feminism. Radical feminism's view is that motherhood is a patriarchal construct and that motherhood must be protected from male domination. Rich (1986, cited in Ichou, 2006) states that patriarchy instils guilt in the psyche of mothers by emphasising "selflessness rather than self-realisation" and "maternal instinct rather than intelligence. She describes motherhood by linking it to wifeness, wherein children are deemed legitimate because they have the father's name ensuring lineage. In

South Africa, there is an increase in the number of female-headed households. Although outdated, Aliber (2003) states that 42% of all African households are female headed. As a result of the number of marriages decreasing, women's concept of motherhood has a different meaning, thus, wifehood and marriage are no longer valued (Walker, 1995).

In contrast, African feminism rejects this notion stating that such a viewpoint is too Eurocentric (Walker, 1995). African feminism contends that motherhood allows mothers the privilege of a social position (Anfred, 2003, cited in Ichou, 2006). African motherhood extends far beyond the European nuclear family and includes the extended family. This explains the term 'remote' mothers which Ichou (2006) uses in her study when referring to working mothers who do not live with their children and leave their children in the care of extended families. Such a practice would definitely go against the institution of motherhood. Russo (1976, in Mottarella, Fritzsche, Whitten, & Bedsole, 2009, p.223) refers to the gender role expectations for women as the "motherhood mandate. In essence, what this theory states is that for a mother to be complete in her mother role, a woman must have children and spend time with them. Thus, for the mother who is pursuing studies, the "motherhood mandate" is likely to impede and impinge on her mother/student role.

Most research conducted on women non-traditional students highlight the point that mothers who are students are faced with certain barriers they need to overcome in order to reach their educational goals (White, 2008, p.160). Some of the barriers focus on family and household responsibilities. Riordan and Louw-Potgieter (2011) point out that research conducted on the proportion of housework performed by men and women respectively, indicated that women are mainly responsible for the household and caregiving, and this even extends to dual income families. These findings are consistent nationally and internationally where women spend more time on average on household duties despite the number of hours they do paid work.

For instance, in a survey done in New Zealand on the needs of students who care for children, key issues were related to time constraints, study load, family life and responsibilities, clashing of college times with parenting times, children who fall ill, childcare and financial issues (Lidgard, 2004). These findings are consistent with findings in the United Kingdom by Arskey, Marchant and Simmill (1994) who contend that mature students found balancing work, study and family life challenging.

In research done by Kasworm (2003, p.8) it was found that the, "responsibility of children has been both a major inspiration and a major deterrent to participation. Similarly, Clarke



(2002, cited in White, 2008, p.170) confirms that the heavy burden of study, work and childcare creates feelings of distress for mothers who are studying, and is therefore likely to lower motivation for them to continue with studying. It is no wonder that the primary reason for mature female adult students dropping out of college is related to family responsibilities (Scott et al., 1996).

According to Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) the age of children is significant in the mother's academic success. Additionally it was found that having older children played a significant role when mothers decide to return to school (Carney-Crompton, & Tan, 2002; Jacobs, & King, 2002; McGivney, 2004). This would explain the finding in a research done by Taniguchi (2005), who reported that young children have a negative effect on women's degree completion. As might be expected, older children have a certain amount of independence, whereas taking care of young children requires added time and effort. In essence, Rowlands (2010) points out that students' who are also parents face a unique challenge in returning to school, regardless of their marital status, the age of the children could be a significant factor in role strain.

Although, nowadays it is acceptable for women to demand space and time for themselves, but such demands and desires are still measured against the ability to fulfil and prioritise their role as 'good mothers first' (Burke, 2002) thus many married college women place their family role first. When the researcher reflects on her own experience as a student with a family, even if attaining an academic qualification will help create a better life for her family, attending to the needs of her family and home takes priority. Sanger (1999, p.109, cited in Pillay, 2007, p.32) rightly states that "mothers are always on duty and rarely lose the habit of concerned responsibility. I suggest that it is the caring responsibilities of a family as first priority that will cause undue stress and guilt on the mother while engaged in studies. Pillay (2007, p.149) talks about the "perceptions of motherhood" and the "sense of moral goodness that accompanies mothering", as these relate to the cultural norms and expectations when it comes to parenting of children. Typically, mothers are often expected to be nurturing, comforting and willing to do almost anything for their children by way of personal sacrifice.

### **2.7.3 RESPONSIBILITY AS A SPOUSE**

According to Galvin (2006) limited research seemed to have been done on marital satisfaction among postgraduate, non-traditional students, but from the research done, all point to some degree of strain on marriage. Some of the examples mentioned in this study relates to less availability to assist with nurturing, less time for marital activities, less social

life with friends, less time and energy to help with housekeeping, lack of family's and partner's understanding of the demands of their study, spouses feeling frustrated by the demands of the coursework, lack of partner's availability, lack or slow progress in the partner's completing his or her education and financial strain. These challenges are the result of the integration of the student, spouse and mother roles and responsibilities.

The study conducted by Edwards (1993) shows that 25% of women left their partners in the course of their study. The two main reasons for this were, firstly, women felt that they were unable to engage with their partners about their studies. Secondly, their partners took up much of their emotional energy but did not share the responsibilities of housekeeping or taking care of the children and this led to women leaving their spouses. It is no wonder that some women admitted that leaving their partners gave them a sense of freedom, because they were now able to take care of their children in less conflicting ways. Leaving their partners also translated into more time for themselves and studying.

The inner battles and sacrifices that women often have to make when they decide to choose to change the status quo at home are best reflected by the study done by White (2008, p.161):

*Rachel (aged 40, three children): It can be very difficult because he is used to me being at home running around after him and now I am not doing that! I've put myself first. We've even been to counselling and were very close to splitting up, but he has made an effort to save our marriage. He has had to do a lot of changing it was an unexpected strain (p.161).*

Research done by Sutor (1988) revealed that better educated husbands supported their wife's return to studying. However, even though they had more positive attitudes, this did not mean that there was higher involvement in household responsibilities. Sutor (1988) further states that the husbands in the study felt that their wives' enrolment had made positive contributions in terms of increase in income. Furthermore, wives were also seen to be role models for the children, and, subsequently, the wives' level of happiness and confidence had also increased. Interestingly, Quimby and O'Brien's (2006) are of the opinion that, women who perceive safe and supportive relationships as well as relationships in which their skills and competence are recognised, demonstrate low levels of distress. In this regard, it seems that, when women feel they are valued and receive recognition for their contribution and efforts, there is a positive shift in their well-being. These days, gender roles are changing and women are increasingly rejecting the idea that they must take on the

“second shift” by themselves, therefore sharing of housework and childcare is often negotiated by partners.

#### **2.7.4 FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY TO THE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT**

Research on non-traditional students has established that having various sources of support is an important factor for non-traditional students who are pursuing academic studies. Heenan (2002), suggest that caring responsibilities, financial constraints and lack of career advice are the main barriers faced by non-traditional students, and as a result of these challenges having support from family members has been found to reduce the stress experienced by adult female undergraduate students (Plageman, & Sabina, 2010). These authors define two sources of support, namely emotional support and instrumental support. They define emotional support as “having someone who is available and willing to listen, talk, care, support, and empathise”, while instrumental support is defined as “providing hands on assistance with such things as finances, childcare, or household chores” (Plageman, & Sabina, 2010, p.157). Thus, having support from extended family members, friends and partners is necessary for this student population to experience success (Bay 1999; Duncan 2000a; Griffiths 2002; Kantanis 2002). Additionally, because non-traditional students spend a substantial portion of their time at work, this is likely to influence the amount of time they dedicate to their studies. If higher education institutions had insight into the experiences of the working lives of non-traditional students, they would be able to assist these students to succeed. The authors suggest that a possible way of achieving this would be to align the curriculum to work. This would be mutually beneficial for the student and the employer, thus students would be likely to persist with the programme and ultimately succeed (Walters, & Koetsier, 2006).

In the South African context, women have been systematically excluded from higher education institutions and the workforce through apartheid policies. I refer to Hood’s (2008, p.9) ideas on women in higher education which is relevant to this study, who makes the point that, “educating women has far-reaching results within families, communities and ultimately nations. This point is significant because it reflects the power of educating women, extends far beyond her immediate environment and is therefore likely to influence and impact other social systems directly or indirectly. As Kwesiga (2002, in Hood 2008, p.9) succinctly puts it, “basic education ensures women’s survival, but higher education promotes empowerment, equality and influence’.

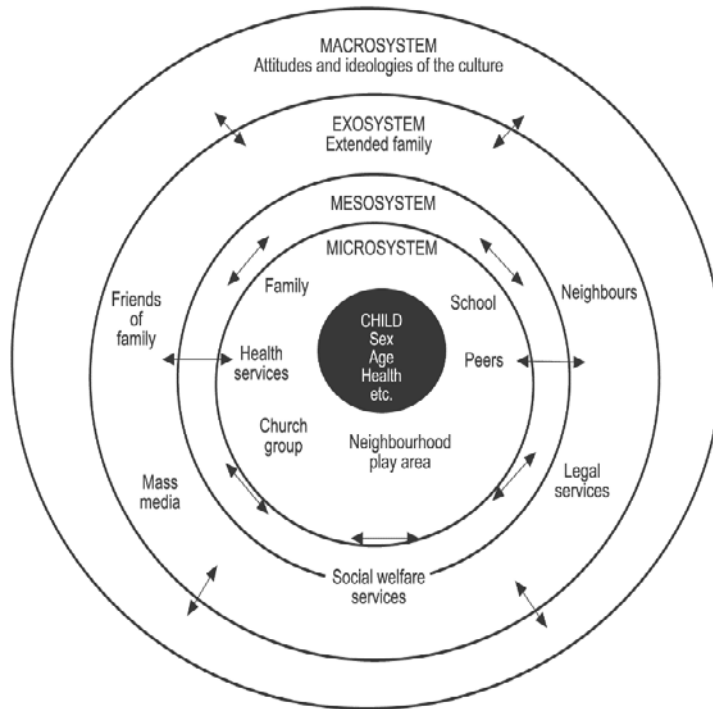
## **2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EFFECT OF A MOTHERS' STUDYING ON THE FAMILY FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **2.8.1 INTRODUCTION**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1994) was used to theoretically frame this study and guide my understanding of the interactive nature of families and the environment over time. In this case, ecological theory presented key elements in understanding how the family is affected by the mother's enrolment in studies. This framework is beneficial because it will offer insights into family dynamics, hence, this study aims to enhance the understanding of a family and how the family interacts, relates to, and experiences the mother's role as student. Bronfenbrenner's theory to families is helpful because it is inclusive of all the systems in which families are enmeshed and it also reflects the dynamic nature of actual family relations (Garbarino, 1992). Furthermore, it is based on the idea of empowering families through understanding their strengths and needs.

The ecological theory of human development has been adapted by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) into the bioecological theory of development and sees everything as interrelated. Development occurs between all living and non-living organisms in the environment and this depicts the interactive nature and the bidirectional relationships that exist between the systems. In essence, this theory explains that in order to understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system which is bound by context, culture and history (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Mampane (2010, p.47) states that "bioecological theory recognises the individual as both influencing and being influenced by the environment and acknowledges the active and diverse relationship that exists between the two. Development, the environment and the bidirectional relationships that exist within the systems will very likely be linked to the effect the mother's studies has on the family.

The ecological model depicts five systems, namely: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, and these systems relate to the interactive and relational processes between the developing individual, the environment and the interaction between them over a period of time. Each system depends on the contextual nature of the person's life and because potentially family members have access to these systems, they are able to have more social knowledge by way of their engagements and interactions within their family.



**Figure 1.1: Representation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems** (Source: Dockrell, & Messer, 1999:39)

The exposure to various systems can lead to an increased set of possibilities for learning problem solving when problems or conflicts arise in a family situation as well as to access new dimensions of self-exploration, in this case, the mother who is attempting to further educate herself in the midst of having multiple roles.

By referring to figure 1.1 it is attempted to show how the person interacts within the context which consists of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem over time, to determine whether and to what effect the mother's studying has on the family. Therefore, I take note that challenges or obstacles located within one system will impact on all other systems denoting the interrelatedness of the systems.

## 2.6.2 BRONFENBRENNER'S FIVE SYSTEMS AND FAMILY

### 2.8.2.1 Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.50) define the microsystem as "a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics." Thus, the microsystem is the smallest system and consists of the immediate environment of the family, e.g. home, school, friends, institutions and workplace. It is within the microsystem that face-to-face interactions occur

which can produce and sustain development depending on the content and structure of the microsystem. Accordingly, Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2007) state that individuals identify who they are by their characteristics and roles which are influenced at the micro level. Examples at this level which could be relevant to this study include the interactions between the family members, support structures by the immediate or extended family to assist the mother, and the way in which the mother constructs her various roles in the family.

### **2.8.2.2 Mesosystem**

Bronfenbrenner (1994, p.40) states that mesosystem comprises of “linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. The mesosystem is a system of microsystems and thus focuses on all the interactions in the microsystem involving an individual. He offers the example of the relations between home and school and says that “events at home can affect the child’s progress in school and vice versa” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p.723). Furthermore, at the mesosystem, expectations, obligations, responsibilities and demands will affect the mother in terms of her multiple roles but will also affect the family. For example, the mother is a student at a university and the study programme, for instance the hours of lectures, could affect how she arranges for care for her children. This demonstrates how the university might influence the home and the family.

### **2.8.2.3 Exosystem**

Bronfenbrenner (1994, p.40) posits that “the exosystem denotes linkages and processes that take place between two or more settings”, the individual may not live in this setting physically but events which occur can directly influence the person within the immediate environment in which the person lives. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1986) states that the psychological development of a child is not only affected by immediate environments but also by what happens in other settings. For example, a child may not be physically present in the parent’s workplace or, in the case of this study, the university at which the mother is enrolled. Therefore, even if we are absent from a system, it does not make it less powerful in our lives; they have a direct impact on us because they bring about stress. I refer to the example of Bronfenbrenner (1986) about the sharing of the student role by the mother and the child. The authors state the relationship sets up two unique paths of influence from mother to child namely an indirect path at the exosystem level, and a direct path at the level of the mesosystem. Thus, the “indirect path represents the influence of mother’s student-role attitudes on the child by way of their impact on the mother’s involvement in her child’s schooling”, for instance, testing the child in preparation for an examination. This supports

the idea that even though the child is not actively involved in the exosystem, the child's development is affected by this system, hence, the child is indirectly involved in this exosystem. Another example would be, while the mother is attending lectures she is affected by what is happening at home and the quality of caretaking provided by the father.

#### **2.8.2.4 Macrosystem**

The macrosystem is the outer level in the system and represents the largest level in the system, and it is from this level that the literature review is viewed. The literature review consists of international studies as well as studies related to the South African context. Mampane (2010, p.54) states that the "macrosystem is the consistencies of the microsystems, mesosystems and exosystems that exist or could exist at a cultural level, belief systems and the underlying ideology. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994, p.40) the macrosystem could be thought of as a "societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture. The existing roles and responsibilities of a non-traditional student are mostly informed by cultural beliefs and expectations shaped within this system. In this case, gender role expectations will be viewed from the macrosystem.

#### **2.8.2.5 Chronosystem**

The chronosystem "encompasses change or consistency over time of the characteristics of a person and the environment in which a person lives, e.g. changes in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment", place of residence, or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.40). Thus, the chronosystem reflects development and interactions between the systems and how it influences the individual over time. Therefore, this study will look at the time or period of the family's exposure and interactions with the mother's studying and its influence on the family dynamics. Furthermore, the influence that the mother's studying has on the family over time illustrates developmental changes the family experiences (including the mother).

### **2.9 CONCLUSION**

From the various readings, it can be deduced that non-traditional students face many challenges when they decide to continue with their education. Dynamics between home, work and institutions all influence their academic success and in trying to improve and make possible educational attainment for non-traditional students, an understanding of the multiple dimensions of this unique student population's life is important. Thus, the ecological model has much relevance for this study; in essence, this theory is phenomenological in

nature. Thomas and Thomas (1929, p.572, in Darling, 2007, p.204) contend that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. This active orientation corresponded well with the current study because the researcher wanted to understand the family’s shared experiences of a phenomenon over time and how they interpreted these.

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## Chapter 3

### Research design and methodology

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#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section begins with a description of the research design and methodology used in this study. It is followed by the processes involved in terms of data collection, analysis and interpretation in a bid to answer the research questions. Furthermore, in an attempt to adhere to the ethical considerations in research, I explore the role that I assumed in the data-gathering process to enhance trustworthiness. Babbie and Mouton (2007, cited in Tsebe, 2010, p.42) state that trustworthiness in qualitative research is established when the “researcher tries to convince the audience that the findings of the study are worth paying attention, or talking about. In this regard, an attempt was made to establish trustworthiness by utilising different data collection techniques instead of using one process only.

#### 3.2 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of the mother’s studying on family life. Based on the researcher’s curiosity and desire to understand the topic, an explorative study allowed her to examine this area of her interest.

#### 3.3 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

##### 3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

A paradigm can be defined as a “set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which gives rise to a particular world view” (Nieuwenhuis, 2008a, p.47). In this sense, a paradigm represents what one thinks about the world but cannot prove. Thus, paradigms serve as the lens through which reality is interpreted. Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979, p.1) describe “paradigms as enabling us to tell a coherent story by depicting a world that is meaningful and functional, but culturally subjective. In this section, the interpretive metatheory and a qualitative methodological paradigm are discussed. These particular paradigms are used to better understand each participant’s individual perspective on the effect the mother studying had on them.

### **3.3.2 METATHEORETICAL PARADIGM: INTERPRETIVISM**

An interpretative paradigm attempts to understand phenomena through meanings that people assign to them. Cohen et al. (2007, p.21) submit that the central endeavour of interpretative paradigm is to “understand the subjective world of human experience. As an interpretivist researcher the aim of the researcher was to understand the perspectives of the participants from inside the family unit as she was of the opinion that an interpretivist paradigm was well suited to this type of study because it focuses on people’s subjective experiences, in this sense it relates to the family’s experiences of the mother’s studying and how they interact with, or relate to, each other (Nieuwenhuis, 2008a).

Thus, the ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to “offer a perspective of a situation and to analyse the situation under study to provide insight into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of the world” (Nieuwenhuis, 2008a, p.47). By choosing interpretivism as a metatheoretical paradigm, the researcher hoped to gain a better understanding of how families made sense of mothers studying and the meanings attached to their subjective experiences.

In conducting this research, the researcher took into account that interpretivist research implied certain challenges due to its highly subjective nature and it relies on interpretation from the perspective of the researcher, therefore she acknowledged the possible influence of her own experiences and thoughts could have on this study. Cohen et al. (2007) suggest reflexivity as a way of addressing this potential challenge. A reflective journal was used to reduce bias as well as a debriefing session with the supervisor during the course of this study.

### **3.3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

I undertook a qualitative study in order to explore the effect of mothers studying on family life. Qualitative research seeks to explore the research as a means of obtaining rich in-depth understanding of the way things are, the motivations and how participants view reality (Charles 2002).

A qualitative approach implies a process of inquiry and understanding whereby the researcher attempts to develop a complex and holistic picture by analysing words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducting a study in a natural setting (Beukes, 2010). The aim of the researcher was to immerse herself in the natural setting (in situ) (Holloway, & Wheeler, 1996) and to see exactly the effects of the mother’s studying through the

experiences they related to her. In this way, the researcher was able to get in-depth knowledge of how the individuals within the naturalistic setting viewed and understood the world and construct meaning out of their experiences as a result of the mother's studying. Nieuwenhuis (2008a) posits that human life can only be understood from within. Therefore, by focusing on the participants' subjective experiences, a qualitative approach afforded the researcher the opportunity to explore the family interactions with or related to each other in the social setting.

A key advantage of qualitative research is its potential to capture data in the form of attitudes and behaviour (Beukes, 2010). I was therefore able to "access the phenomenon directly, to observe it to its fullest extent in order to develop a deeper and a more complete understanding, (Babbie, 2005).

However, qualitative research accepts researcher subjectivity in the data-gathering process (Nieuwenhuis, 2008a). Therefore, the researcher made use of credibility by verifying the data with the participants in order to ensure that she made the correct interpretations. Member checking further ensured that the transcripts and themes that emerged from the study were accurate. The researcher also had to keep in mind that she was bringing her own subjective interpretations into the study, and in order to address this challenge she made use of a journal to record any subjectivity in her study.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN: CASE STUDY**

In this section, the research design is discussed in terms of a single case study design selected for this qualitative research. Bromley (1990, in Maree 2008, p.75) defines case study research as a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events that aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. Denscombe (2003) states that case studies enable the researcher to focus on one instance or individual instances rather than a wide spectrum which could be beneficial because more insight could be gained from looking at a single case that would otherwise not have been possible by looking at a number of instances. Case study design provided a holistic understanding of how participants in this particular family interacted and related to each other.

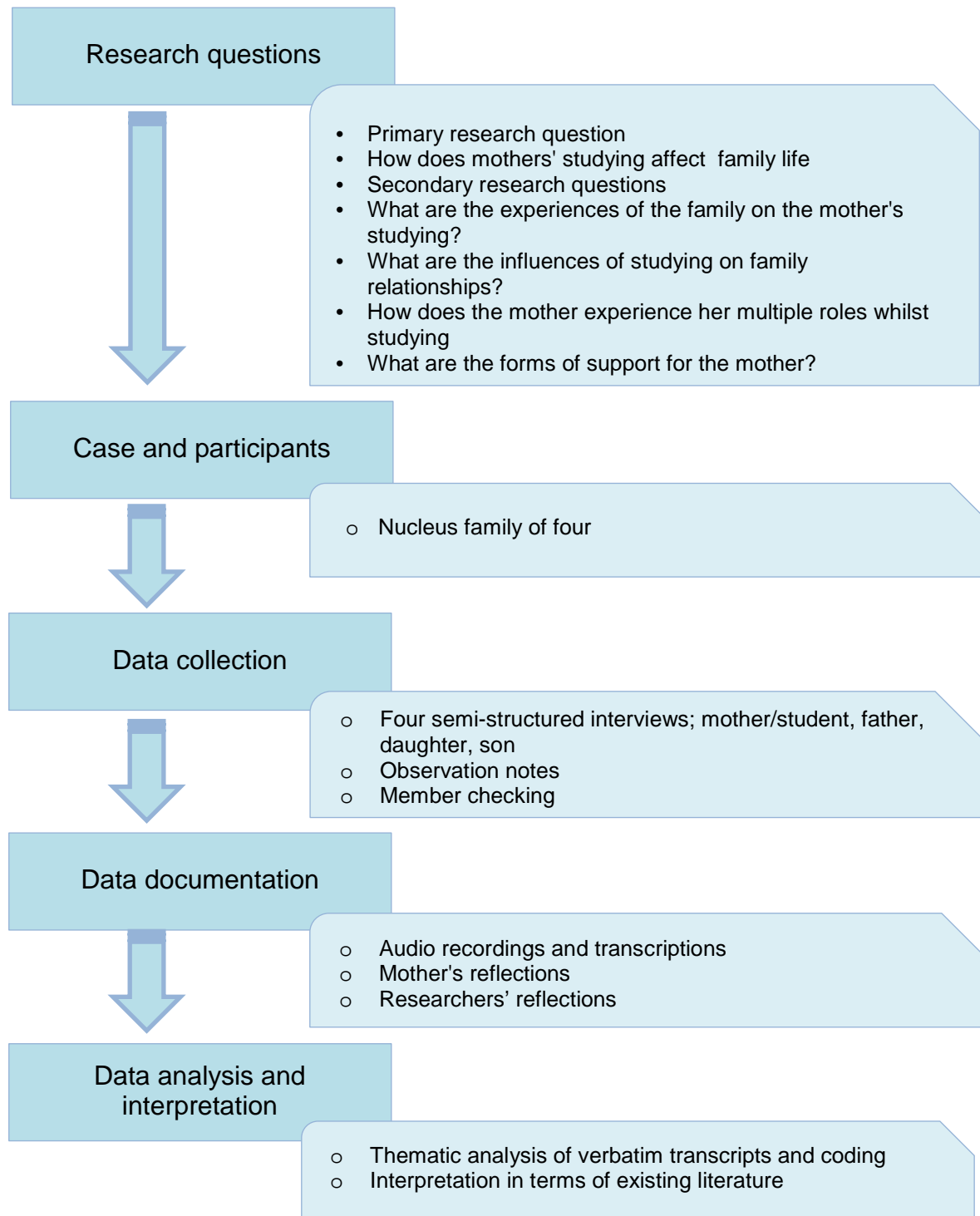
The advantage of employing a case study design is that case studies "opens the possibility of giving a voice to the powerless and voiceless like children or marginalised groups", (Nieuwenhuis 2008b, p.75). The study involves children, therefore the case study design allowed the flexibility to explore the topic within the natural setting in order to explore the children's experiences of the mother's studying and the meaning they ascribed to it. Due to

the explorative nature of case studies (Yin, 1984) it was able to describe and come to a deeper understanding of the real dynamics of the situation and people (Cohen et al., 2007) within a naturalistic environment in an attempt to answer the research question.

A key strength of the case study design is the use of multiple techniques in the data-gathering process (Yin, 1994). Interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to get an in-depth look into “what it is like” to be in a particular situation (Geertz, 1973; Cohen et al., 2007, p.254), in this instance, a space in which the mother was occupied with academic studies and to gain greater insight of their thoughts and feelings for the situation.

However, case study design has certain limitations in that case studies are not open to crosschecking and therefore are prone to possible bias and subjectivity (Cohen et al., 2007). By maintaining a reflective journal and having regular discussions with an experienced researcher (the study supervisor), in the current study the researcher attempted to reduce possible bias and subjectivity.

Furthermore, a specific phenomenon of research remained central to this study, thus ensuring that the researcher stayed focused on phenomenology. In this study, a family remained the case of investigation, while the focal phenomenon was the effect of the mother’s studying on her family. Thus, phenomenological approach is important to note. English and English (1958, p.23, cited in Cohen et al., 2007) posit that a phenomenological study “is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality. In this sense, phenomenology is based on personal knowledge and subjectivity, with emphasis on personal perspective and interpretation (Lester, 1999). Therefore, the phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to gather data on the experiences the family, including what the mother ascribed to her studying. Lester (1999) points out that phenomenological research seeks to describe rather explain, and is therefore effective for describing the experiences and perceptions of participants from their own perspectives. In this sense, the “what” and the “how” from the participant’s perspective is what the researcher would be investigating.



**Figure 3.1: Research Process**

### **3.5 SAMPLING PROCEDURE AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

#### **3.5.1 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING**

Due to time and cost constraints, it is virtually impossible to include an entire population in a study, especially if that population is very large. Therefore, a researcher will make use of a

smaller group or subset, which is referred to as the sample. According to Cohen et al., (2007, p.100) appropriateness of the methodology, instrumentation and suitability of the sampling strategy ultimately determines the quality of research. Lester (1999, p.1) asserts that “phenomenological approach can be applied to single cases or deliberately selected samples. In accordance with the phenomenological approach, I chose non-probability, purposive sampling which is often used for small-scale research. According to Babbie (2005), with purposive and non-probability sampling, the sample is “hand-picked” for the research. This implies that the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events, and purposively selects them because they are seen as most likely to produce the most valuable data. This type of sample is typically employed with the understanding that it does not represent the wider population and the findings would thus only apply to the sample in question. More specifically, purposive sampling in this sense allows the researcher to acquire in-depth information from people who are in a position to provide it, (Cohen et al., 2007).

### 3.5.2 RESEARCH SAMPLE

Hycner (1999, p.156, cited in Groenewald, 2004, p.8) states that the “phenomenon dictates the method, (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants. In qualitative research, the researcher determines the sample as well as the sample size. Accordingly, the family in this study had to satisfy the following criteria; the family had to be a nucleus family and the mother enrolled in academic studies. Thus, based on the researcher’s knowledge about the qualities of the family, in particular the mother, she is of the opinion they were most suited to the relevance of my study (Babbie, 2005). The mother is pursuing undergraduate studies on a part-time basis at a correspondence institution. The father has academic qualifications and is full-time employed as a policeman. Ball (1990, p.115) maintains that, in purposive sampling, the researcher gains access to “knowledgeable people”, because they have in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon by way of experience. The father had a diploma and thus insight into pursuing further education and was in a position to relate to the mother’s experiences with higher education.

**Table 3.1: Description of the participants**

<b>Participants (n=4)</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Spouse</b>	Working full-time, age 46
<b>Mother</b>	Student and works full-time, age 39
<b>Daughter</b>	Grade 5, 12 years old
<b>Son</b>	Grade 3, 8 years old

### 3.6 DATA COLLECTION AND DOCUMENTATION

Having decided to make use of a case study research design, the researcher chose semi-structured interviews, observation notes, the mother's reflections as well as the researcher's reflections. These data collection methods implied that the researcher would be able to capture in-depth data and to report on the experiences of the participants in a meaningful way.

**Table 3.2: Data collection and documentation strategies**

Participant	Strategy	Documentation
<b>Spouse</b>	Semi-structured interviews Observation notes	Audio recordings
<b>Mother</b>	Semi-structured interviews Observation notes Reflections	Audio recordings
<b>Daughter</b>	Semi-structured interviews Observation notes	Audio recordings
<b>Son</b>	Semi-structured interviews Observation notes	Audio recordings

#### 3.6.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Maree (2008, p.87) states that the aim of the qualitative research interview is to “see the world through the eyes of the participant”; in other words, the purpose of the researcher is to enter into the participant's perspective on a particular phenomenon. In qualitative research, there is a distinction between open-ended or unstructured interviews, and semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2008b). The researcher chose semi-structured interviews as it afforded flexibility in terms of the order of the questions posed and allowed the participants to speak widely and freely on the issues raised by the researcher (Denscombe, 2003). In this way, the researcher was also able to follow up on comments made during the interview process. Although the researcher made use of a set of predetermined questions and initially directed the interview, it was important not to be too structured. There had to be some flexibility in the approach, especially because children were interviewed. The researcher found that with the children she had to probe deeply when listening to their stories. In planning the research process, the duration and place of the interview were important factors. In terms of the duration of the interviews, semi-structured interviews made it possible to gather a sufficient amount of information in a short period to avoid the interview from becoming an arduous bore, and the level of concentration of the children had to be taken into account. In interviews, the age of the children can be a

limitation thus, the ages of the children were taken into consideration and since children were both at an age where cognitively and linguistically they would be able to engage, other data collection methods, such as collages or drawings were ruled out. The interview was the only data-collection method employed to get as much data as possible.

Simons and Lewis (1982; 1992, cited in Cohen et al., 2007) make the comment about interviewing children: they say children have the tendency to say anything rather than nothing at all. The researcher was aware of the fact that this could potentially limit the reliability of the data, however, an advantage of semi-structured interviews is that it allows for probing and clarification of responses which addressed this challenge adequately.

Mayall (1999, cited in Cohen et al., 2007:p.374) asserts that children “lack power and control over their own lives” and goes on to say that it is important to ensure that “children are given a voice and an interview setting in which they feel comfortable. It is for this reason that the researcher chose to conduct the interviews close to the natural setting, which was the participant’s home. In choosing the home, it was hoped that the children would be comfortable enough to talk about what was being asked and to answer in an honest way without feeling threatened. Ensuring that each participant was interviewed separately further allowed them to talk freely without feeling intimidated by the mothers’ presence. The researcher established rapport with them by engaging in small talk, such as questions about school. Participants provided their own pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality of their identity and they were allowed to be comfortable in their own home and by choosing their own sitting arrangement.

### **3.6.2 OBSERVATION NOTES**

Observation within qualitative research allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being observed within the natural setting (Nieuwenhuis, 2008b). In this way the researcher was able to get into the situation and gain insider perspective on the family dynamics, behaviours and communication patterns; in other words, observation allowed me to capture what my audio recorder was unable to. For the purpose of this study, the notion of observer as participant was relied on and therefore the focus was mainly on observing and on making sense of the dynamics in the family, but to still remain detached from the setting. Moreover, the purpose of utilising observation as a data-gathering technique was linked to the research sub-question in order to guide this research. Hence, the researcher looked for cues linked to the key construct of the sub-question on the effect the mother’s studies had on relationships in the family. In doing so, the researcher recognised that she could be subjective and biased. Furthermore, she



understood that not all behaviours can be observed (Nieuwenhuis, 2008b). Thus, to counter this challenge she started the interview process slowly and she gently allowed the participants to share their experiences with her and confide in her. She also observed their interactions before and after the interviews and recorded the observation notes as and when she made an observation and included any hunches.

A potential challenge was to be clear about the role of the researcher and not to be a therapist, especially when engaging with the mother. I knew that this would affect the credibility of my research. Thus, I relied on reflexivity and having discussions with my supervisor in order to counter bias and value judgements (see Appendix A).

### **3.6.3 REFLECTIONS**

Reflexivity recognises that researchers are inescapably part of the social world that they are researching, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p.14, cited in Cohen et al., 2007). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) go on to say that researchers bring their own biographies to the research situation and participants behave in certain ways in their presence. In this regard, they assert that researchers should disclose their own selves in the research and attempt to understand their influence in the research. Since the current research topic was close to the researcher's personal experience, she was very much aware of her reactions, roles and biases that might affect the research. Similarly, Babbie (2005) states that researchers are likely to become too involved and moved by the personal problems of the people they are studying.

In order to remain true to the process of reflexivity in research, Speziale and Carpenter (2007, in Beukes, 2010, p.45) suggest that researchers should clarify their "personal thoughts, ideas, suppositions or presuppositions about the research topic and possible personal biases. In doing so, researchers should be able to "bring to the consciousness and reveal what they think about the topic honestly and openly" (p.45). In order to separate personal views and preconceptions from the study, the researcher recorded her thoughts, ideas and insights gained during the course of this study. She also made descriptive notes of her observations of how the family interacted with each other before and after the interviews. Nieuwenhuis (2008, p.105c) makes the point that impressions recorded in a reflective journal prompt the researcher to "critically consider the ideas and insights gained during the study against the patterns emerging from the data".

Besides the researcher's reflections the mother's reflections were also used. Spradley (2001, p.71) points out: "A reflexive journal includes a record of participant's experiences,

ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs and problems. The mother in this study allowed the researcher to make use of her reflections as part of data collection in which she recorded her experiences relating to her studies. Additionally, the researcher's reflections, as well as the mother's enriched data, were collected during the interview process (see Appendix A and B)

#### **3.6.4 AUDIO RECORDING AND TRANSCRIPTIONS**

All interviews with the participants were audio recorded after obtaining their permission first. Audio recordings made it possible for the researcher to listen to the recordings repeatedly. In addition, the researcher could also maintain eye contact and in doing so observe the participants' non-verbal behaviour while making short notes. The verbatim responses of the participants were then transcribed (see Appendix B). Cohen et al. (2007, p.365), state that "transcribing is a crucial step in interviewing, for there is the potential for massive data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity".

Zinker (1978, cited in Groenewald, 2008) purports that "the term phenomenological implies a process which emphasises the unique own experiences of research participants, the here and now dimensions of those personal experiences gives the phenomena existential immediacy. Thus, by transcribing recordings key words, phrases and statements were captured, and the voices of the participants could be heard (Groenewald, 2008). However, Cohen et al. (2007) caution against the researcher believing that transcriptions tell everything that took place in the interview. A possible reason for this is that transcription is a record of data rather than a record of the social encounter, for example non-verbal cues. In fact, Nieuwenhuis (2008c) cautions against making use of a typist to type the transcripts. He asserts that it is best that all data be transcribed by the researcher so that non-verbal cues are included in the transcript. He goes on to say that words such as "well...er...I suppose", laughter or gestures are important elements of a conversation that should not be ignored. This challenge was addressed by making notes on non-verbal behaviour during the course of the interview.

#### **3.6.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

According to Nieuwenhuis (2008, p.104c) once the data has been sorted and typed, the researcher needs to "get to know the data inside out. He contends that good analysis often depends on the researcher's understanding of the data.

In this study, the researcher relied on thematic analysis in order to identify and analyse emerging themes from all the data collected. Thematic analysis is a method aimed at identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data. The advantage of using thematic analysis is that it allows for flexibility and the ability to reflect reality. Themes provide direction for what the researcher is looking for in the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2008c), and can be described as an important aspect in the data which holds significant relation to the research topic. Themes emerge from the data with significant frequency and represent patterned responses in the entire range of data. This process involves examining data and looking for patterns in the data (Babbie, 2005).

The data analysis processed is summarised in the following steps as discussed by Terre Blance and Durrheim (2002, p.29): (Appendix C)

*Step 1:* In an effort to familiarise herself with the data collected, the researcher re-read all the transcripts, the observation notes and the mother's reflections in order to look for significant patterns or statements made by participants.

*Step 2:* In this step the researcher looked for potential emerging themes in all the data collected and sorted them into categories. In doing so, she was able to identify common themes.

*Step 3:* This step involved a coding system. This was done by utilising different coloured pens to underline phrases or paragraphs, which were related to potential emerging themes. The categories were then classified into potential themes guided by the verbatim responses during the interviews and from the mother's diary.

*Step 4:* During this step elaboration themes were revised and defined by tabulating emerging themes and sub-themes.

### **3.6.6 QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The researcher attempted to ensure rigour of the study by adhering to quality assurance pertaining to trustworthiness, credibility and transferability in order to ensure the quality of the study.

#### **3.6.6.1 Trustworthiness (reliability/dependability)**

In qualitative studies, the term trustworthiness refers to the way in which the inquirer is able to persuade the audience that the findings in the study are worth paying attention to and that the research is of high quality (Cohen et al., 2007). The researcher attempted to ensure

trustworthiness by employing different methods of data collection. In addition, she also strove to eliminate any bias that might impact on the research by constantly reflecting on the research process (Maree, 2008).

### **3.6.6.2 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the accuracy of a particular context or event as described by the researcher. In doing so, the researcher ensured that the findings were presented in a convincing and believable way (Maree, 2008). Interview notes were made and the interviews were transcribed. Furthermore, the researcher relied on debriefing with her supervisor to increase the credibility of the study and by documenting her own thoughts and reflections. Transparency, further enhanced credibility by providing participants with the opportunity to comment on the transcribed interviews during member checking to determine the credibility of transcripts.

### **3.6.6.3 Transferability**

Transferability is the degree to which the researcher can take the findings of the study and transfer them to other contexts (Maree, 2008). Interpretivist studies aim at providing rich descriptions based on the perceptions of the participants, thus, it was not the aim to generalise the findings to the wider population (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative studies are not meant for generalisation, instead it represents unique events and subjective representation of multiple realities. Various data collection methods were used; for example, semi-structured interviews, observation notes and reflections. In an attempt to adhere to the principles of transferability, I made use of thick descriptions of the participants and the context by supplying rich descriptions on the effect of the mother's studies on the family.

## **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher strove to adhere to ethical considerations throughout the study and was mindful of the fact that she was a guest in the participant's home and therefore acted in an ethical manner, particularly because she was dealing with children. It was important that she remained aware of the rights of the children and that they were aware of their own rights as participants in this study. The following ethical principles were adhered to throughout empirical research:

### 3.7.1 INFORMED CONSENT, ASSENT AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Diener and Crandall (1978, cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p.52) define informed consent as “procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decisions. This definition implies that, if a researcher provides individuals with the relevant information and is upfront and open about matters, especially where there is the likelihood of pain or intrusion, and participants understand this, then they are in a better position to make an informed decision. In order to ensure ethical research, the researcher discussed with the participants the purpose of this research, what was required of them and whether the possibility of harm existed, and that she had received informed consent to conduct the research. This study included children, although the authors caution against the use of children in research. They are of the opinion that when an “extreme form of research is planned, parents would have to be fully informed in advance and their consent obtained. Whatever the nature of the research, should a child show any signs of discomfort or stress, the research should be terminated immediately (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to obtain informed consent and assent, participants were informed of the research that would be undertaken. She provided the participants with detailed information explaining to them what was expected of them during the course of the research. This involved explaining and gaining their consent that she would be making use of audio recordings of the interviews with them. I sought permission from the parents to interview the children, I further gained informed assent from the children by providing them with a comprehensible explanation of the nature of my research in line with their level of understanding (see consent letters, Appendix D1). Fine and Sandstrom say the following:

*Our feeling is that children should be told as much as possible, even if some of them cannot understand the full explanation. Their age should not diminish their rights although their level of understanding must be taken into account in the explanations that are shared with them.* Fine and Sandstrom (1988, in Cohen et al., 2007, p.54).

In the face-to-face interview a letter was presented to the mother and father to sign and to the children to indicate their informed and voluntary decision to participate. Lastly, the fact that participants may withdraw at any time if they wished to do so without penalty was emphasised. In addition, by means of an extremely thorough ethical clearance process, ethical clearance was granted from the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria certifying that the study was ethically sound (see Appendix D1).

### **3.7.2 PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

In order to protect the participants' interests and well-being, the researcher carefully adhered to the principles of privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process (Babbie, 2005). Beukes (2010, p.46) states that the "principles of confidentiality and privacy are concerned with providing respect and protection to research participants by assuring the confidentiality of information shared as well as anonymity by not revealing the identity of the individuals involved. In ensuring confidentiality, the researcher made it clear to the participants that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study by not using their names, therefore, results would be presented in an anonymous way. In the case where the mother's reflections were used, the researcher sought permission from the mother to use the notes from the reflections. I further assured the mother that the notes from the reflections would be kept safely at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years (Beukes, 2010). According to Maree (2008), participants in the study must be clear about the confidentiality of the results and the findings of the study.

### **3.7.3 PROTECTION FROM HARM**

It was important for the researcher that no harm was brought to the participants as a consequence of this study. According to Babbie (2005), social research should never injure the participants being studied, regardless of whether or not they volunteer for the study. Harm could include emotional, physical or psychological distress. Therefore, the researcher understood that in order to gain in-depth information, she would have to establish a good level of rapport and empathy with participants (Lester, 1999). One of the ways I maintained this was to not ask probing questions that might harm them (Babbie, 2005). She also observed the participants very closely during the visit in their home for signs of discomfort or distress because she concurs with Beukes (2010, p.47) who states that "it is important not to reveal information that might embarrass participants or endanger their home life, work life or friendships. Therefore, the researcher was respectful and sympathetic to participants at all times and fully aware that she had many obligations to the participants in this study (Babbie, 2005). It was also because of this that the researcher informed the participants that debriefing was available should the need arise, so that any that any problems that might have occurred, could be corrected. Informed consent also ensured that participants were fully aware of and understood the potential risks involved in the study. However, the researcher did not anticipate any harm in the cause of the study.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the process for collecting and analysing data for the purpose of answering the research question was documented. Furthermore, the data analysis method of thematic analysis was explained and attention was paid to quality assurance in order to adhere to the ethical considerations in her role as researcher.

In the next chapter, the results of the study were presented by categorizing the data into themes and sub-themes. By means of interpretation of the results, the findings of the study are discussed in the next chapter.

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## Chapter 4

### Research results and discussion of findings

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#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the results of my research followed by an analysis of the data obtained during the data collection processes. The presentation of the results is structured under themes and sub-themes that emerged from an analysis of the data. A distinction is made between the nuclear family and the extended family; therefore, when referring to the family, I am referring to the nuclear family, which comprises the husband, wife and children living under one roof. The extended family refers to the paternal and maternal parents, siblings or relatives.

A key to the abbreviations used in the representation of the data is found in Table 4.1. Distinctions are made between data collected from the participants in the family, the researcher's notes from her reflections and the mother's reflections.

**Table 4.1: Abbreviation keys**

Source	Abbreviation
Notes from researcher's reflections	RD
Notes from mother's reflections	MD

In order to protect the identity of the participants in this study, although the children provided pseudonyms, the researcher uses the terms father, mother, daughter and son to refer to each family member respectively. In this way, anonymity of participants is ensured.

#### 4.2 RESULTS OF THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In this section of the chapter, the researcher made use of inductive qualitative thematic analysis. This process entailed the coding of the interview transcripts taken from the initial interviews and the member checking process (see Appendix C) to identify relevant themes. This study yielded four themes from the data and each theme and its sub-related themes are discussed in detail below.



Table 4.2 presents themes and sub-themes that emerged from coding the data,

**Table 4.2: Themes and Sub-Themes**

Themes		Sub-themes
1.1	The family's overall experience of the mother's studying	1.1.1 Studying as a protective factor 1.1.2 Studying as a risk factor
1.2	Influence of studying on family Relationships	1.2.1 Nuclear family 1.2.2 Extended family, peers
1.3	Roles within the family	1.3.1 Wife role 1.3.2 Mother role 1.3.3 Student role 1.3.4 Gender specific role
1.4	Forms of support experienced	1.4.1 Nuclear family support 1.4.2 Extended family and peer support

#### 4.2.1 THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF THE FAMILY ON MOTHER'S STUDYING

This theme explores the protective and risk factors the mother's studying has brought to the family. Table 4.3 outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sub-themes.

A discussion of the theme and sub-themes that emerged from the data is presented and evidence to support the themes is supplied. Based on the theme, it is clear that the family's experience varied between positive and negative. It also emerged that the mother held a different view of how the family experienced her studying.

**Table 4.3:**

Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1.1 Studying as a protective factor	Any reference to family from the mother and the family on the mother's studying, including feelings of understanding, accommodating and future rewards.	Any family strengths and commitment unrelated to studying by the mother and family members.
1.2 Studying as a risk factor	Any reference to risk and negative comments from the mother and the family on the mother's studying, including feelings of displeasure or unhappiness.	Any risk and negative reference unrelated to studying by the mother and family members.

The first broad theme that emerged from the interviews related to the family's experiences of the mother's studies. The sub-themes that emerged under this broad theme related to the protective and risk factors highlighted by the mother's studies.

#### 4.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Family Protective factors highlighted by the mother's studying

From the interviews, it emerged that the mother's studying highlighted the strengths, commitments and perseverance of family members. The mother's perception of her husband and son's experiences are expressed in her own words.

The mother noted her husband's view of her studying as future rewards.

*(Lines 173-174) "On the one hand, he is feeling better because he knows the end is in sight"*

Similarly, the son's positive remark on the mother's studies related more to how he would benefit financially in the end: *(Lines 667) "...if she gets more money can buy more toys"*

The mother assumes that the children's experience of her studying is influenced by their age and level of maturity. This is clearly marked by her comments regarding her daughter's experiences of her studies.

*(Mother, lines 60-63) "She is older and understands a lot better, now that she is also writing exams she understands my situation and often studies till late. When I tell her she has to go to bed, she says "but you study till late why can't I?"*

The daughter showed signs of intrapersonal coping skills to the mother's studies *(Daughter, Line 586) "I think I am getting used to it"* she perceived the time her mother spent studying as an opportunity for her to spend more time with her when they both studied together.

*(Daughter, lines 627-631) "Nice, ... she also said because I am studying a lot now, because I'm starting with my tests on Tuesday, and she said she will study with me, like when she studies her work and then I can study my work, together"*

The mother's studying has influenced the daughter to start thinking deeply about studying and family life, she affirms that her future plans would be different from that of her mother.

*(Mother, lines 64-65, referring to daughter) "She wants to do things a lot different when she is older, study first and then have a family".*

The daughter understands more and is able to compare her situation with that of her mothers, in this sense she mentioned that she wanted to do things differently when she is grown. This can be seen as a positive developmental outcome because the decision to focus more on studying and having a career leads to better prospects in her view.

However, among the family members there was an expectation of reward for them once the mother had completed her degree. The family believed that the mother's studies have future benefits for them. They saw it as an investment and a means of security for the family. From this statement, the mutual benefits of the mother's studying as seen by the family are clearly stated:

*(Father, line 457) "We do not see the benefit now, maybe after she qualifies"*  
*(Daughter, lines 542-544) "Mom is studying so she can get a degree and a job that pays more money, a half day job so she can spend more time with us, do fun things"*

*(Son, line 667) "If she gets more money she can buy more toys"*

The father and the mother believed that the sacrifices they make are an investment that will benefit the family; this investment is directed towards the mother's educational pursuits. Their financial commitment stems from the plans they instituted to make this happen and this ultimately motivates the mother to persist in her studies. The mother responded as follows:

*(Mother, line 30) "All the sacrifices we make is channelled towards my studies, but it is not a burden, he (father) does see it as an investment"*

*(Mother, lines 183-185) "We've made the decision and we'll live with whatever happens from a financial point of view, we've got plans in place and whatever so that I can just get through the study"*

Because of this belief, they see her studies as a means of creating a better life and security for the family and this is evident when she says

*(Mother, lines 406-407) "Ultimately I am also studying for them, because the more security I have the better it is for them"*

The father admits that the mother's studying has not been easy for the family, especially when it comes to spending family holidays together. However, the father and the children continued to spend time together, involved extended family members and maintained healthy family functioning in spite of the challenges of the mother's studying:

*(Lines 452-455) "She uses her leave to study for exams, for three years no vacation leave only last year we went on holiday close to Margate. I go hunting to the farm where my sister lives, the kids go with me"*

The above quotes by the father show that continuing the family traditions is important and that the mother's studying has indeed inconvenienced the family, but this has not completely

stopped them from spending time as a family during holidays. It seems as if 'excusing' the mother from these expected social practices, aims to afford her time alone to study

*(Lines 418-421) "It is very difficult....but I have to do it so that she can study"*

The form of support the husband gives to his wife and children highlights the resilience of this family and the father's significant role in ensuring that the mother is able to accomplish her goal of completing her studies. He took responsibility around the house so that she can have more time to study again he showed empathy towards his wife.

*(Father, lines 479-480) "Most of the things I had to do on my own to give her time to study, it's difficult for her"; (lines 494-496) "I think if you have to do your normal household duties and study it's going to be very difficult to concentrate on the studies ya"*

When the researcher asked the father if he has any plans to study, he replied: *(lines 458-460) No way both of us can study, I got a diploma in 1994, maybe later I will study something.* This statement further confirms the demands of the mother's studying on the family time and the hope the father has about the future.

The father and the children understand that they have to allow the mother time to study, and this means they know the sacrifice they all make by not spending quality time together, this is how the daughter conceptualised her delay of gratification and her understanding: *(Daughter, lines 545-546) "If mom was not studying she would paint, bake biscuits, watch movies, buy books and read together.* The significant role the father plays is best reflected by the daughter when she admitted that, if she needed something she would rather ask her dad, *(Daughter, lines 564-565) ... won't bother her, ask dad so to give her time so she is not under stress".*

From the above comments, it is evident that the family shows strengths and understanding about the mother's studying. To allow her the time to pursue her studies is seen as a protective factor, a characteristic that enables her to manage stress and the father ensures that the children are protected from her perceived stress by stepping in and accomplishing her responsibilities. What is more evident is how the father is able to hold the family together and create normalcy for the children and still allow the mother to study.

#### ❖ **Mother's Experiences of success**

The mother made positive comments regarding her studies and the positive bond it created with her family. This was evident from several comments made during the interviews:

*(Mother, line 10) "My husband is very supportive and motivates me in my studies. He will tell me that exams are coming closer so I need to start studying"*  
*(Mother, lines 82-83) "She (daughter) says that she feels very proud that I study"*  
*(Mother, lines 114-115) "When I started studying, I took two modules because I did not know if I could do it because I thought a degree would be too difficult"*

Obviously, the mother is experiencing success with her studies because she is still enrolled and almost finished with her degree.

RD:

I was truly touched by Daughter's insight and the vision she had for herself, without any judgement for her mother: *(Daughter, lines 582-583) "She did not choose to do it this way, I must do it differently"*

#### ❖ **Family commitment**

The family is committed to the mother's studies, the husband and wife are united in their efforts towards it. Mom negotiates with the children for quiet study time and the husband provides quiet space for the mother to study

*(Mother, line 51) "We trade off, "if you leave mom alone to study, tomorrow I will spend time with you"*

*(Mother, line 55) "I have to sometimes go to my husband's office to study"*

#### ❖ **Husband and wife unity**

The relationship between husband and wife is represented by their communication, which is clear. The mother's studying is perceived as 'their' decision and commitment, this is mostly represented by 'we' in their communication:

*(Mother, line 183) "We've made the decision and we'll live with whatever happens from a financial point of view, we've got plans in place and whatever so that I can just get through the study..."*

The husband notes with appreciation the respect his wife is giving him, and she is able to acknowledge his supportive role in and commitment to her studies:

*(Husband, lines 532-536) "...she really appreciates what I'm doing, we miss out on being together but we both understand why she's doing it, we understand the purpose of it, as I said, she appreciates what I'm doing, if we are lucky she would be finished by the end of this year, or next year..."*

### ❖ **Time management and planning**

There seems to be a great deal of planning so as to create time for the mother's studies, The mother is able to plan well ahead of time and work around family routine to ensure that the children are accommodated:

*(Mother, lines 47-54) "I do my assignments right in the beginning of the year to get it out of the way, then its only my exams. I start at eight in the evening when the kids go to bed, on weekends, at least one day on the weekend I am studying"*

Especially the father understands the mother's need for time and the difficulty she experiences when she does not devote the necessary time to her studies. Backed by the father's empathetic support, the mother is able to plan easily and work ahead in preparation for her examinations.

*(Father, lines 479-480) "Most of the things I had to do on my own to give her time to study, it's difficult for her"*

### ❖ **Motivation and commitment to study**

The mother indicates how intrinsically motivated she is to study and to improve her academic dreams and the family's financial position:

*(Mother, lines 105) "...my aim is to make a better life for my children, no pain no gain"*

The mother stated that she could not study after she had completed matric due to her mother's and sister's illness. However, she always knew that she wanted to study and even now has plans do study further. The following statements demonstrate her future goals, commitment and motivation to improve herself:

*(Line 116) "80% is for self, 20% is for work progress"*

*(Line 118) "I believe you have to be the best version of yourself that you can possibly be"*

*(Line 122-125) "I will do a master's degree... it's probably going to happen..."*

*(Lines 157-158) "...the main thing is to get through my studies, that's the main thing, I want to pass it this year"*

The mother is focused and determined in her academic pursuit. The following statements further illustrate her academic commitment and motivation to complete her studies, as well as the time she devotes to her studies

*(Line 170-171) "So, ja, my focus this year is on the fact that I must complete, seven subjects aren't that bad if you think that I've passed eight previously, so it's not bad; I can do it"*

*(Lines 194-196) "I don't want to lose credits, and I don't want to study again next year, not this anyway"*

*(Line 218) "So I studied for two weeks solidly at the school, straight after work... I set there weekends; studying"*

#### **4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Studying as a risk factor**

All the family members made negative comments about their experiences relating to the mother's studies. I quote:

*(Father, line 467) "Dis nie lekker vir my, after she finishes it will be better"*

The above quote when translated, *"it is not nice for me"*, demonstrates the frustration and negative feelings the husband has towards the mother's studies but he is hopeful that it will change once the mother qualifies. Accordingly the mother agreed that husband may not verbalise his frustration, the wife senses his negative attitude:

*(Mother, lines 95-98) "He does not say he is gatvol, but we are married for 16 years, I know what gatvol looks like. He finds my exams just as stressful as I do, he is just not as verbal"*

*(Father, line 457) "We do not see the benefit now, maybe after she qualifies"*

Based on the interview, the son was not able to verbalise his experiences with regard to the mother's studying and this was clarified by the mother as she noted that he is: *(Line 70) "not very verbal"*. However, his behaviour, as described by the mother, indicates his frustration and lack of understanding whenever he was expected to allow his mother time to study. This could be seen as the son's sensitive nature when his routine is disrupted and his demand to spend more time with his mother is denied.

*(e.g. Mother, lines 249-250) "Ja, and if I would come home first and eat and leave there would be chaos, he would be hysterical"*

This behaviour is understood to be the result of him missing his mother

*(Father, line 434) "It is difficult for him because he spends no time with her"*

The above analysis of the son's experiences of the mother's studying indicates his need to be closer and around his mother and her absence during studying created the separation he detests and similarly the mother felt guilty.

*(Father, lines 502-505) "At this stage, luckily she also went to study at the school, at the children's school, because you tell the children 'Don't interfere, she is*

*studying' but they still do, especially for my son. Daughter is ok, he is still small so he doesn't understand that she tries to concentrate"*

*(Daughter, lines 548-553) "Not nice, sad, angry. Yes, sometimes I talk to her about it, she says it's only a year left, I tell my brother, he also feels the same , we can have a nice conversation about it"*

*(Mother, lines 55-58) "My son does not understand and gets "gatvol. He would be fine if I told him that I have stopped studying, says my studies are stupid"*

The son experiences feelings of frustration, being ignored and somehow rejected by his studying mother. According to the son, when asked how he felt about his mother's studies, he replied:

*(Son, lines 645-646) "Not nice when she studies", I try to play with her, mess with her. I get into trouble. She says don't do it (NO), gets cross, screams at us, says 'don't irritate me', I don't feel nice"*

*(Son, line 665) "Don't like mom studying"*

The son spoke about how much he missed his mom *(Son, lines 666-667) "I miss her a lot, but afterwards if she gets more money I can buy more toys. When the researcher asked if he needed something when mom was busy studying he replied:*

*(Son lines 716-720) "No I will ask daddy, because she doesn't finish, because it takes longer for her to finish with her studies"*

The following quotation from the mother illustrates the son's strong resentment towards the mother's studies.

*(Mother, lines 55-58) "My son does not understand and gets "gatvol. He will be fine if I have to tell him that I have stopped studying, says my studies are stupid"*

The mother stated that when she is busy studying she keeps the son occupied on the computer, he makes comments like: *(Line 73) "stupid studying"* and tries to get her attention by putting his arms around her. She further states: *(Line 73-74) "He is not being aggressive but his entire demeanour tells me this, when I am not studying he leaves me alone, he senses that my attention is not with him, he hates it"*

The father reported that the son missed his mom and felt somewhat rejected and ignored. Accordingly, the father confirmed what the son had said, that he tries to play with her in order to get her attention, *(Father, line 428) "Son misses mom a lot"*



The mother and the father are fully aware that the mother's studies is not a pleasant experience for the son and the son wants her attention and tries to get it in various ways. The daughter is older than the son and handles the situation differently, however, she also had negative experiences associated with her mother's studies, for example:

*(Daughter, line 548) "Not nice, sad, angry"*

*(Lines 557-559) "When she is studying, it's not nice, she does not speak a lot, tired, frustrated, shouts for small things like if I drop a glass she gets mad but if she was not studying it would be fine"*

#### ❖ **Mother's negative experiences**

The mother reported on her emotional state during exam time when she spends more time studying and the dad has to spend more time with the children. The mother reported being impatient, blaming the children for not giving her space and time to study and being torn apart with guilty for ignoring the children: *(Line 87) I become snappy with the kids, especially my son*. This was reinforced by the dad, *"exam time she shouts at them to go away"*, the mother reported feelings of *"feeling torn"*, *"it breaks my heart"*, *"I feel bad"*, *"feel guilty all the time"*. Clearly, the mother misses having fun with the family and this is represented by a sense of jealousy when the father and the children are having fun: *(Lines 88-89) "I am blatantly jealous about the time he has with the kids"*; *(Lines 104-106) "I feel guilty all the time"*

These words expressed by the mother relate to the negative experiences she has as a result of her being pulled into different directions.

MR:

*(Lines 789-794) "There are many, many times that I am unable to attend a social function over a weekend (e.g. a rugby game and braai) because I am studying- this is very tough on my kids and my son has asked me many times, why I am not like the other parents and why don't I spend more time with them"*

*(Line 803) "I feel like a total outsider"*

There is no financial support from the mother's workplace for her studies, so she pays for her own studies, which puts strain on the family's financial resources

*(Mother, line 24) "... strain on the family, there is a lot we do without and have to make sacrifices because I pay for my own studies, with no financial support from work"*

At some point, the mother questioned her decision about studying and had thoughts about discontinuing. From the husband's perspective they have already invested a considerable amount of money in the mother's studies, therefore, discontinuing her studies was not seen as a viable option.

*(Mother, lines 27-30) "Last year, I was tired and wanted to quit, my husband said no, let's do a calculation of how much we have paid, and then we realised that it was not worth it to quit because we had invested too much already"*

The financial sacrifices and difficulties the family is experiencing seem to come from the mother's decision to leave a high-paying job and change careers, emanating from her work ethics as she succinctly stated:

*(Mother, lines 199-202) "...having to decide to leave a job where I was earning good money, for ethics sake, and moving into something that I obviously didn't make that much money"*

*(Mother, lines 213-216) "My emotional state wasn't great because of me moving jobs and the stress of the financial stuff"*

The financial strain is also felt by the children, for example, the mother commented: *(Mother, lines 240-241) "...a lot of his friends are in private schools, which is one of our financial stressors..."* This clearly illustrates the sacrifices the children make for the mother's studies.

#### ❖ **Academic fatigue challenges and demotivation**

The length of studies and emotional stress are felt by the whole family, especially the mother who is adamant about completing her studies, but also frustrated that changing employment has prolonged her studies unnecessarily:

*(Mother, lines 5-8) "I am in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year, I was supposed to finish this year but had to extend it to next year because I started a new job. Instead of 3 years it will now take me four and a half years"*

The mother's frustration with prolonged studies is felt in her words:

*(Mother, lines 345-348) "I'm turning 40 next year, dammit, I can't still be studying this stupid bachelor's degree after I'm 40, that would be terrible, I can't do this anymore, it needs to get done now, it really needs to get done now"*

The emphasis on wanting to complete illustrates her need to bring this study to completion and this was mentioned several times during the interview.

*(Mother, lines 195-196) "I don't want to study again next year, not this anyway, probably something else but definitely not this, it needs to finish now"*

Fatigue is evident and can be seen as the demotivating factor and a possible precursor to the mother's stress and overwhelming need to give up studying:

*(Mother, lines 27) "...last year I was tired and wanted to quit..."*

*(Mother, lines 224-226) "I only realise now how incredibly tired was at the time, at that stage you just kind of push through, but now I realise I was very tired"*

The exams are felt by the whole family and characterised by sacrifices and accommodating the mother's academic needs. Other family members are sensitive to her needs and would provide her the space she needs. The mother requires alone time and the husband takes on all responsibilities, this seemed to cause emotional strain on the family

*(Mother, lines 68-69) "During exam time the husband gets stricter with the kids because I am more stressed"*

*(Mother, line 97) "He finds my exams just as stressful as I do, he is just not as verbal"*

*(Mother, lines 248-259) "...go and study and then come home...he didn't see me by this time so it was this vicious circle, he didn't like it very much"*

*(Father, lines 503-513) "Because you tell the children don't interfere, she is studying. But they still do, especially my son, my daughter is still ok but my son is still small so he doesn't understand that she is trying to concentrate....he bothers her and then she has to start over. But you can see they are missing her, and then when she's finished studying then they want to spend a lot of time with her and talk to her...they are missing her, they want to spend time with her"*

During exams the mother also turned down invitations to social events and the family missed her presence at functions. The father and children often attend social and family events without the mother when she is studying. In this regard, the father continues family traditions and practices with the children. This again, indicates continuity of traditions and family beliefs where the family maintains the social life as expected and the mother is excused because of her studies. This is well stated by the family members: The father stated,

*(Lines 465-469) "I go alone with the kids", "it's not nice for me after she finishes it will be better", for the kids family gatherings are difficult because everyone is there as a family except us"*

*(Lines 463-464) "During exam time she turns down invitations"*

The daughter stated:

*(Lines 573-574) "I think she should be there, they make me mad, not nice with only boys there, if there's a problem, she's not there"*

The children felt the difference in the home environment during exams and enjoyed and looked forward to their time with the mother when the examinations were over. This sentiment is demonstrated in the following statement made by the daughter: *(Lines 555-559) "Its better after exam time, she rests, picks us up from school and buys ice cream, when she is studying, it's not nice, she does talk a lot, tired frustrated, shouts for small things like if I drop a glass she gets mad but if she were not studying it would be fine. Similarly, the son also commented: (Lines 643-650) "I know what exams are, not nice when she studies"*

Academic institutions' lack of support is a challenge for the mother, inefficient administration processes provided a certain amount of uncertainty as to when she would complete her studies.

*(Mother, line 137) "They terrible, their administration is atrocious" (Mother, line 162) I didn't have time to fight the system"*

Work-related challenges contributed to her not devoting the necessary amount of hours to her studying.

*(Mother, lines 205-210) "So, initially, after moving I didn't focus enough on my studies because I was trying to get my job up and running, thinking it's gonna go a lot quicker than it actually did so that caused a bit of stress and I worked really late, long hours, which I still do)"*

Lack of time meant that she had added pressure, which impacted on her emotional wellbeing and further contributed to her stress.

*(Mother, lines 213-216) "My emotional state wasn't great because of me moving jobs...so I actually started late, I started end of September and I was writing, in October so I literally didn't prepare enough"*

In summation of this theme, participants communicated both positive and negative experiences related to the mother's studies. Again, the mother has expressed her joy and frustrations with her studies. Ultimately, the family's perceived experiences on the mother's studying are both positive and negative.

MR:

*(Lines 826-831) "My books specifically are very costly and I have had many instances where my children had to live with less than their friends, in terms of luxuries and little things that make them more socially acceptable than their friends. This is HARD as I feel as if I am taking things away from my children for myself and this has made me feel really selfish"*

#### 4.2.2 THEME 2: THE INFLUENCE OF STUDYING ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Family relationships were affected in various ways, either directly or indirectly. From the data, it emerged that the nuclear family felt both positive and negative experiences with their relationships. However, it seems as if the mother's studies had limited influence on relationships with the extended family members.

**Table 4.4:**

Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
2.1 Nuclear family	Any reference to how relationships with immediate (nuclear) family members were influenced (i.e. father, son and daughter – here the helper as an occupant in their home is included).	Any reference to how relationships with family members who do not live in the same house, e.g. extended family, paternal and maternal parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents
2.2 Extended family and peers	Any reference to relationships with family members living outside the nuclear family house, who are related to the nuclear family, e.g. paternal and maternal parents, siblings, cousins. Peers, friends of the nuclear family were affected by the mother's studies.	Any reference to relationships with immediate or nuclear family members were affected by the mother's studies.

##### 4.2.2.1 Sub-Theme 2.1: Nuclear Family

Under this theme, the family shared the same sentiments about the time the mother spent away from her family, especially during exam time. The children communicated that they missed their mother, specifically the son who became even more demanding during exam time when he knew his mother was unavailable, the following statements demonstrates how the son attempt to get his mother's attention:

*(Mother, lines 7-71) "Puts his arms around me just to get my attention"*

*(Mother, lines 73-82) "When I am studying, he seeks my attention but when I am not studying he leaves me alone, he senses that my attention is not with him"*

It seems the daughter has adjusted to the mother's absence to a certain extent, the mother reported that the daughter withdrew and she explained that this is possibly because the daughter is older than the son and understands the situation better. This does not mean that she enjoys the situation. However, the mother commented that after writing exams she had to re-establish her relationship with the children.

*(Mother, lines 76-78) "Daughter withdraws, she understands but does not enjoy it. She literally leaves me alone, after exams I have to re-establish my relationship with them"*

The daughter made the following comment about her father: *(Daughter, line 568) "He's like a mother and father.* In essence, the daughter is saying that in the absence of her mother, her father is playing a dual role and the daughter realises this. However, as a girl she needed her mother as there are certain things only a mother can do. The following quote demonstrates this:

*(Daughter, line 570) "With personal things I am closer to mom" and (Lines 574) "Not nice with only boys there, if there's a problem, she's not there" (by saying 'boys' she is referring to her father and brother).*

On the other hand, the husband takes over the care giving so as to allow the mother time to study, the son understands that if he needs anything he has to go to his father as he is not allowed to interrupt his mother. They understand that, if the mother is not allowed the time to study: *(Son, line 720) "it will take longer for her to finish"*

However, the father is aware that the children miss their mom:

*(Father, line 443) "It's her presence they want"*  
*(Father, line 477) "They want mommy, dad cannot do that for them"*

#### ❖ **Strong emotional bonds**

As a way of spending family time together, the mother made the following comment:

*(Mother, lines 323-327) "Friday nights is non-negotiable for us, then we do something together as a family, we'll buy steak and we'll cook a steak, and we all, so we try to make up for it in other ways, it just means that my family doesn't take the time that we have together for granted"*

The mother and son share a strong emotional bond and he depends highly on his mother, in the mother's own words

*(Mother, lines 230-238) "...since he was very small he is very close to me...he was literally tied to me, I carried him in one of those pouches...so since he's been very small he's really close to me, so it's very hard for him that I spend time away from him"*

The mother and daughter share a strong emotional bond and they make time to enjoy being 'girls' in the family by spending time together with gender specific activities, this evident in the following statement made by the mother:

*(Mother, lines 262-269) "I can talk to her and I can explain stuff to her and she and I have whatever she refers to as girls' day, so we tried now over December, we did it a couple of times where we would just go out, just me and her, we'll go for a coffee and we'll go shopping, or whatever, or just go and see a movie on our own, or whatever, so I find she understands more, she definitely understands better"*

The father and son share a strong emotional bond and, similarly, father-son time is seen in specific family gender specific activities:

*(Lines 267-268) "Father would take the son and they go to the shooting range, shoot a couple of rounds or whatever"*

The mother and father share a strong marital bond and they enjoy spending time together as a couple:

*(Lines 471-472) "We try to make time for each other, sometimes my parents will look after the kids or her friend Jo so we can spend time together as partners"*

#### ❖ **Clear communication**

Lines of communication in this family seem open, clear and strong. The children are made aware of what is happening with their mother's studies when the father said:

*(Lines 518-519) "Then I talk to him and he will understand and he will leave her alone"*

*(Lines 525-526) "She will tell them they must give her chance to study, she explains to them the reasons why"*

The daughter stated: *(Lines 620-621) "No she has not received her books yet, she is starting the following week.* The researcher asked if the mother had told them this and the daughter replied: *(Line 623) "Yes. (Lines 627-631) "Nice, because mom said if she does good this year she doesn't have to write exams next year, she also said..."*

This family communicated with each other and they knew what was ahead of them, so they planned around the mother's studies. This helped the family to adjust and to cope better

RR:

As a mother who is studying listening to these children express how much they miss their mother and how they feel each time she cannot be with them makes me think about my children and what they must be going through. I felt sorry for the children, they pay the biggest price....

#### 4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Extended Family and Peers

The following quotes show that there is a distance between the mother and her extended family, specifically her father, sisters and brother Based on the relationship, the mother's studies will not have a negative influence on her relationship with them. Since her father never enquires about her studies: *(Line 40-41) "My dad does not ask about my studies, can count the number of times he asked about my studies on one hand"* the mother feels that he does not have any interest in her studies. On the other hand, the mother did mention that her father had spent some time with her children during the holidays, so the grandfather seems to be nurturing the relationship with his grandchildren, this, however, is not extended to the mother and her studying. The mother made the following comments: *(Lines 307-308) "My dad took them they went on holiday for a week"*

On the other hand, the husband's family studied, therefore, they have something in common with the mother and can thus use this experience to share,

*(Mother, line 42) "Husband's family they have studied understand my studies more and support me"*

#### 4.2.3 THEME 3: ROLES WITHIN THE FAMILY

The following themes were extracted in terms of the multiple roles the mother manages. Although the mother reported challenges with balancing multiple roles, there were some positive outcomes for the mother/student role she shared with her children. In this section, even though the mother has a work role in addition to her role as wife, mother and student, her work role would not be explored.



**Table 4.5:**

Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<b>3.1 Wife Role</b>	Any reference to positive or negative role experiences as a wife, references to her role as wife and how she functions in the role	Any reference to her other roles except the wife role
<b>3.2 Mother Role</b>	Any reference to positive or negative role experiences as a mother to her children, inferences to her role as a mother and how she functions in the role	Any reference to her other roles except the mother role
<b>3.3 Student Role</b>	Any reference to positive or negative role experiences as a student only, references to her role as student and how she functions in the role	Any reference to her other roles except the student role
<b>3.4 Gender specific Role</b>	Any reference to positive or negative role experiences as gender role and the functions within the role	Any reference to other roles except gender role

#### 4.2.3.1 Sub-Theme 3.1: Wife Role

The mother made the comment that, this year, she is writing an exam on her husband's birthday and she does not know how to tell him that she will try to make up for this. She uses the example where she and the husband spent time together during the December holiday (*Mother, lines 312-316*) *"I'll cook something he likes or whatever, so we try to make it up like that, you know make up the time like."* This quote shows that she tries to make up for lost time, especially missing a special occasion like the husband's birthday. She described missing the occasion as *"hard sometimes"* (*Mother, line 298*). The mother's reference to the husband as my (*Mother, line 300*) *"poor husband"* and (*Mother, lines 105-108*) *"I feel guilty all the time"*. This supports her regard for her role as a wife. The mother recognises the genuine interest her husband has for her career and academic aspirations, and the following words reflect this:

*(Mother, lines 298-306) "...a lot of other guys if I listen to my friends, with some of them, their husbands doesn't even want them to work late, husband has always been very supportive of my job and my studies, and all of that he's never given me any nonsense"*

From the quote below it appears that the mother tries to compensate by doing something special to make up for the lost time between herself and her husband.

*(Mother, lines 312-316) "That week, for instance, every night we would try to do something different, you know cook something, I'll cook something he likes or*

*whatever, so we try to make it up like that, you know make up the time like that, he's never been resentful, or rude or angry, about it"*

RR:

I am amazed at the amount of support and understanding the husband has for his wife's studies. It is so important for women to be supported by their husbands unconditionally.

#### 4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Mother Role

During the discussion the mother indicated that the family value their time together (*Mother, line 326*) "*My family don't take the time that we have together for granted. Regarding the children the mother makes special time for each child, for example (*Mother, line 261*) "Girls' day" with the daughter and (*Mother, line 284*) "bath time" with the son. Spending time with Mom means a lot to the children, this is evident when the mother makes the comment that:*

*(Mother, lines 293-297) "They've got a better understanding of time and they understand how much I am away, that means a lot to them, I can't say to one of them, we gonna do it and then we don't do it, they get really upset, and especially, on that I could rather tell that they won't eat dessert tonight but I mustn't take that away they get very upset"*

Clearly, the mother values her time with her children and this is further illustrated in the following comment made by the mother:

*(Mother, lines 284-292) "I've always tried to make a point of spending time with them on their own, that's just the thing I do, son's time on his own is bit different, he baths in the evenings, I need to sit there and read a story, and then we'll discuss the story and then I'll quickly just kind of check all the spots that he might have missed and then I need to help him get dressed, that's what he likes. Obviously, if he had his way we'll do that every night, but it can't work that way, so that's kind of his thing but I try to do little things, I've always tried to do that"*

Reflecting on her feelings, the mother described strong feelings of guilt she experienced as a result of her studies.

*(Mother, lines 105-108) "I feel guilty all the time"*

*(Mother, lines 368-370) "It's bad enough that I have to study and be away from my children, the last thing I want is for them to be with people who don't really want them there"*

Instead of leaving her children in the care of extended family members, she would rather take care of them herself. She developed a strategy for coping with her studies and attending to her family responsibilities for times when her husband is not available. She indicated that she would sacrifice her study time by taking care of the children and then start studying later than she would normally do. The quote below presents the mother's feeling about caring for her children.

*(Mother, line 367) "I'll rather study 2-3 hours later at night"*

*(Mother, lines 397-404) "... son got so ill that once, he had stomach flu, right in the middle of an exam, I was writing the next day, he was puking all over the house, he was so flippant ill, and then you had to kind off sort him out and get him to bed as once he's asleep, 2 or 3 in the morning what do you do, you writing the next morning, you sit down and you study"*

The mother keenly felt her mother role and the quote (Mother, line 405) "They did not ask to be here" expresses the feeling has about her childcare responsibility. Although the mother is immersed in her studies and she mentioned several times during the discussion that completing this degree is important to her and the family, she also says that her family is her first priority and she makes the point that: (Mother, line 415) "So ja, they always take first preference. However, what also came out clear was that incorporating studies with family life was challenging as she tried to juggle multiple roles.

#### **4.2.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Student Role**

The student role poses distinctive challenges for the mother. Within the institution there were certain challenges the mother had to overcome. The mother reported that ineffective administrative processes are a frustration for her. This resulted in her uncertainty as to when exactly she would be completing her degree. All through the discussion with the family, a point that was reiterated many times was that all family members were anxiously waiting for the mother to finish her studies, for example, the daughter made the following comment:

*(Daughter, line 624) "Mom said if she does good this year then she doesn't have to write exams next year"*

*(Mother, lines 194-196) "I don't want to lose credits, and I don't want to study again next year, not this anyway, probably something else but definitely not this, it needs to finish now"*

*(Mother, lines 343-348) "It's not even a negotiable, I have to finish this year, I'm not doing this again next year, I'm turning 40 next year dammit, I can't still be studying this stupid bachelor's degree, after I'm 40, that would be terrible, I can't do this anymore, it needs to get done now, it really needs to get done now"*

Challenges were also seen by the way in which the mother managed her studies during exam time and this was noted in the following evidence:

*(Mother, lines 214-226) "So I actually started late, I started end of September and I was writing in October so I literally didn't prepare enough. I didn't study specifically for stuff like financial management where your preparation needs to be extensive, so I started late and I studied for two weeks solidly at the school, straight after work, so my husband would get the kids, bring them home, I go straight there and study, because if I come home first my son wouldn't let me go, so then I would sit there and study for 3 or 4 hours. I sat there weekends studying, and then obviously during exam I also did that but I only realised now because the office is closed for two weeks over December, and I only realised now how incredibly tired I was at the time, at that stage you just kind of push through, but now I realise I was very tired"*

The mother has the underlying belief in good work ethics and this belief is demonstrated in her operating as a role model for her children. Because of this belief, it will transpire in a positive attitude towards learning and hard work in her children. They are already showing signs of being conscientious in their school work and this is evident in the positive feedback she receives from the children's teachers:

*(Mother, lines 407-414) "They see you have to take the pain now to see the gains later, that's what I am trying to teach my children as a role model. All the teachers tell me both my kids are incredibly hard workers, it's not me saying to them to be like that, I think they are thinking that's how it supposed to be"*

*(Mother, lines 415-417) "... when you are in grade 5 and you get a 95% average in your final exam"*

*(Mother, line 374) "My daughter got a laptop because she passed very well."*

*(Mother, lines 382-388) "... daughter sits now that she's older ... and hopefully that creates a bit of work ethics"*

These quotes perhaps reflect the positive outcome of the student role model that the mother represents to the children.

The daughter and the mother are utilising the mom's student role to their advantage, they made the decision to study together and in this way, not only are they getting their school work done, but they also get to spend time together, the daughter made the following comment:

*(Daughter, lines 624-634) "She also said because I am studying a lot now, because I'm starting with my tests on Tuesday, and she said she will study with me, like when she studies her work and then I can study my work, together".*

For the daughter, this also means that the mother will be in a position to see what she as a student is faced with

*(Daughter, lines 636-637) "... happy because you know there's someone who knows how you feels the whole time"*

Despite the challenges the mother experiences in her student role, she aspires to pursue post-graduate studies. Her desire to study further is expressed in the following words,

*(Mother, lines 122-123) "Maybe when the kids are a bit older, I will do a master's degree, I am busy toying with the idea, it's probably going to happen"*

She reported that post-graduate studies would be more for personal fulfilment rather than be career directed; in her words:

*(Mother, lines 124-125) "The BCom is just to put myself on the map professionally, the honour's and master's are for myself"*

#### **4.2.3.4 Sub-Theme 3.4: Gender Specific Roles**

In this family, gender roles are clear. As mentioned, there are specific activities the mother and daughter and the father and son share. However, when it comes to the mother's studies there is an almost role reversal between the father and mother.

The daughter made the following comment about her father: *(Daughter, line 568) "He's like a mother and father"*, in essence, the daughter is saying that, in the absence of her mother, her father is playing a dual role and the daughter recognises this. However, as a girl there are certain things only a mother can do. The following quotes demonstrates this:

*(Daughter, line 570) "With personal things I am closer to mom"*

*(Daughter, line 574) "... not nice with only boys there, if there's a problem, she's not there"* (by saying 'boys' she is referring to her father and brother).

The daughter also understands her role as a woman and some day a mother. She said:

*(Daughter, lines 271-272) "I first want to study and then have children"*

*(Mother, lines 261-267) "You know what I think my daughter is getting better at it, because I can talk to her and I can explain stuff to her.." and Daughter and I have, what she refers to as a "Girls day", so we try now over December, we did it a couple*

*of times where we would go out just me and her, we'll go for a coffee and we'll go shopping, or whatever, or just go and see a movie on our own, or whatever the case might be"*

Despite the positive that emerges from this experience, an important facet of this theme is that it highlights the pressures the mother experiences from the competing demands of her multiple roles, and the process of managing time amidst her multiple roles further contributes to the challenges this family experiences.

#### **4.2.4 THEME 4: FORMS OF SUPPORT EXPERIENCED**

From the data it emerged that the mother relies on the husband for many of the family responsibilities. She reported feeling supported by her husband for her educational efforts and this in turn provided her with an enabling environment to pursue her studies. The sources of support are divided into emotional support (i.e. acceptance, encouragement, praise) and instrumental support (i.e. financial, child care, household).

**Table 4.6:**

<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
4.1 Nuclear family support	Any reference to support given to the mother by the immediate family (nuclear family) i.e. father, daughter, son or helper	Any reference to support provided by relationships with others, i.e. extended family or peers, or those who live outside the family home
4.2 Extended family and peer support	Any reference to support given to the mother by the extended family or peers, i.e. in-laws, siblings, cousins	Any reference to support provided by relationships with nuclear family, i.e. husband, daughter, son or helper

##### **4.2.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Nuclear family Support**

###### **❖ Instrumental support**

The mother relies on the emotional and physical support provided by her family, and the husband plays a central role in providing the necessary support for her studies. She has great admiration for her husband and appreciates the support she receives from him. The mother spoke about the hands-on responsibility of managing the house provided by the husband, for example, care giving for the children, attending to all the household chores, preparing meals and transporting the children around, and this is confirmed by all the members of the family, for example:

*(Mother, line 37) "My husband is my sole support"*

*(Mother, line 367) "It's me and my husband"*

*(Mother, line 19) "When I am busy studying, he takes the children visiting, keeps them occupied, makes sure they bath, does the washing, homework with them, drives them around"*

The father commented as follows on his care giving and household responsibilities in order to create time for the wife to study:

*(Father, line 476) "I drop the kids off at school and pick them up. I do washing, cooking except on weekends and I do the dishes"*

*(Father, line 420) "I play a bigger with the kids than she does but I have to do it so that she can study"*

The daughter made the comment that: *(Daughter, lines 563-568) "During exams we need to help a lot like wake her up, I help her a lot, I help her cook.* This statement seems to suggest that the entire family provides support to the mother in a number of ways, including the help they get from the helper who comes in once a week.

The support provided by the husband was reinforced by the daughter and the son who made the following statements about their father:

*(Daughter, line 568) "Dad cooks for us, picks us up, does homework, prepares us for tests, watches movies with us"*

*(Son, lines 707-708) "... homework, I think that's all and he helps with lots of other stuff"*

#### ❖ **Emotional support**

The mother referred to her husband as being understanding and she receives a high level of support from him: *(Mother, lines 10-11) "...is very supportive and motivates me with my studies. He will tell me that exams are coming closer so I need to start studying.* He knows her career is important to her and that she works hard.

She compares her husband to her friend's husbands and feels that her husband *(Mother, line 307) "... never gives her any nonsense.* The husband communicated that his wife appreciates what he is doing for the family and he commented that: *(Father, line 538) "it's worthwhile.* Despite the level of support the mother receives from the husband in terms of care giving, as a wife, she feels disconnected and this is evident: *(Mother, line 319) "It's like we live in a commune, we sleep in the same bed, we eat at the same time"*

From the data it emerged that the mother contributes more by way of income: (*Mother, line 16*) “... husband is a policeman so I contribute more by way of income. The husband recognises her as a provider and has a profound understanding of the importance her profession has for his wife (*Mother, lines 14-15*) “My husband knows that my career is important to me and that I am hard working. The mother indicated that her husband knows she is hard working, and believes in her academic ability, thus, the investment in his wife’s studies seems worthwhile. Thus, he supports the wife to such an extent that he plays a bigger role with the children so that she can study.

The support provided by the father was prevalent in the following statement: (*Daughter, line 568*) “He’s like a mother and father”.

The husband communicated that it was (*Father, line 471*) “very difficult for him” and that it was also difficult for her to manage: (*husband, line 482*) “it’s difficult for her”, but that he needs to support her in order to give her time to study: (*Lines 493-496*) “to give her to chance to study, otherwise she won’t be able to cope with all, I think if you have to do your normal household duties and study it’s going to be very difficult to concentrate on the studies, ja”

The mother made the following comment about the daughter:

(*Mother, lines 81-82*) “Daughter supports me and tells me I miss you very much, she says that she feels very proud that I study”

RD : Reflection

It must be so difficult for other mother’s who do not have the amount of support this particular mother has.

#### 4.2.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Extended Family and Peer Support

From the data it emerged that although there is support from outside the home, support is limited in some instances and non-existent in others. When the researcher asked the husband if they received any outside support, the husband responded by saying (*Father, line 537*) “No luckily not. The mother does not feel supported by her extended family specifically her father, brother and sisters, she said -

(*Mother, line 37*) “My dad is retired so he travels the world, no support from him”



### ❖ **Instrumental support**

When asked about other forms of support she receives, the mother mentioned a friend who helps with the children: (*Father, lines 471-473*) “...sometimes my parents will look after kids or her friend Jo so we can spend time together as partners. The mother commented that her friends respect her studies and allow her time to study; the father often visit alone with the children,

(*Mother, line 101*) “I have to juggle my time with studies and our friends. Friends are very respectful of my studies”

Other forms of support provided were the mother’s manager who, according to the mother, supports her “100%”, (*Mother, lines 191-192*). The school principal has also provided support to the mother in terms of allowing her to study at the school during the evenings when she was busy with exams (*Mother, lines 210-212*): “... a friend of mine is a school principal where my kids go to school, she gave me the keys to one of the classrooms...” All these forms of support assist the mother in her educational pursuits. There is also the helper who comes in once a week.

### ❖ **Emotional Support**

She receives emotional support from her husband’s family (*Mother, line 42*) “... husband’s family they have studied, they understand my studies more and support me”; however, her mother in-law is not always able to support her with the children because of her illness (*Mother, line 35*) “My mom in law will look after the children but she is ill, has renal failure so even if she offers, she is not always up to it. Although the mother is able to turn to her mother in law for support, she does not want to take advantage of her

(*Mother, lines 349-352*) “Both my sisters and brother stay very far away from me, like I told you before, my family is not very supportive of my studies...”

(*Mother, lines 362-364*) “I know if I ask my husband’s parents to help, they will, so their support is there but it’s also limited because of his mom being ill, I don’t wanna take advantage”

In summation of this theme, without support from, especially the nuclear family, the educational pursuits of the mother will be met with many challenges and could even possibly cause the mother to drop out of university. Support for the mother is provided from levels outside the family system, which shows the interconnectedness and interrelatedness between the family system and other systems, which all affect the mother.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

The researcher presented the data in this chapter around four central themes, which reflected the experiences of the family from each of their own perspective. In the following chapter, the qualitative results are provided. In chapter 5, the current literature is explored against the findings of this study, which concludes with a final discussion, potential contributions, limitations and recommendations.

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## Chapter 5

### Addressing research questions, Recommendations and Conclusion

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#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focused on the effect a mother's studies have on family life. In chapter 4, the findings of the study subsequent to thematic analysis are presented by relating them to current literature as well as to the theoretical framework in chapter 2. In this chapter, the final conclusions are provided. The researcher addressed the secondary research questions and the primary research question that guided this study. She then reflected on the potential contributions as well as the limitations of the study and concluded this chapter with recommendations to guide further research in this area of non-traditional students.

#### 5.2 OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

In **chapter 1**, the study was contextualised while an overview of the study and the rationale for conducting this study were presented. The researcher presented the research questions along with the assumptions that guided this study. The chapter also introduced the paradigmatic perspective, the research methodology and moved on to present the data collection strategies and concluded with the ethical considerations.

In **chapter 2**, relevant and current literature on non-traditional students was explored, in particular, mothers' who are non-traditional students. The researcher then proceeded to present the theoretical framework, namely the ecological systems theory to inform the effects mothers' studies had on family life.

The research methodology was outlined in **chapter 3**. The interpretivist paradigm is discussed and the researcher's choice of a case study as a research design and the selection of participants are presented. The data collection and documentation strategies, namely semi-structured interviews, observation notes and reflections were described in detail. An overview of the process of thematic analysis and the interpretation that followed were presented. The chapter was concluded by discussing the quality criteria towards which the researcher strove to ensure the rigour of the study and the ethical guidelines considered.

In **chapter 4**, the research results that emerged from thematic analysis of the data, four themes, including ten sub-themes, were discussed in full. The first theme related to the family's experiences of studying presented either as positive or negative experiences; the second theme was the influence of the mother's studying on family relationships and this was related to the nuclear family, extended family and peers. The third theme looked at multiple roles of the non-traditional student, for example, wife role, mother role and student role and gender role. The sub-theme that emerged from the fourth theme centred on the forms of support from the nuclear family and extended family. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the findings of the study against the backdrop of current literature and research.

### **5.3 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The current study was guided by research questions posed in line with the title of the study, the rationale and the problem statement. The discussion in examining how the research questions were addressed flows from chapter 4 and is aimed at evaluating whether the study's aims were achieved and the questions posed were addressed, and to position the findings in accordance with existing literature and the adopted research framework. As discussed in chapter 4, each of the research questions brought to the fore themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data.

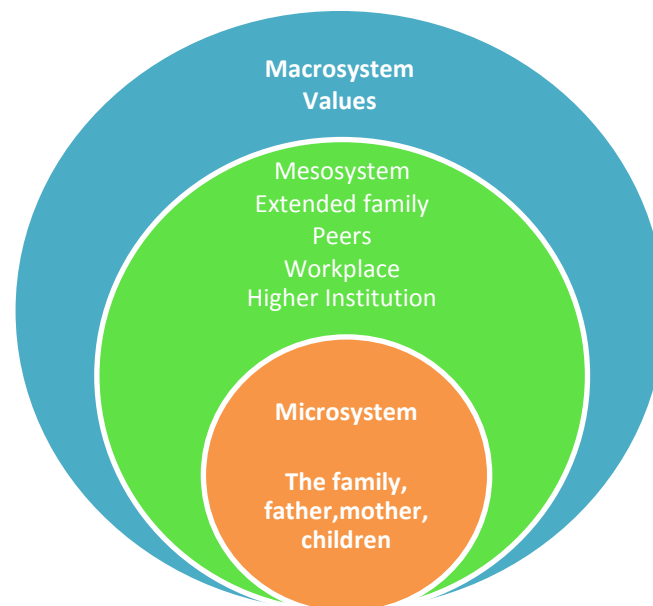
The phenomenological approach adopted in the study allowed the researcher to probe further during the interviews in order to gain in-depth understanding of the family's perceptions of the mother's studies. Thus, the researcher was able to bring alive their stories to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience, which provided me with a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. Attention was given to the various systems that involved the mother and how these systems impacted the educational experience of the mother and invariably the family, thus the ecological theory was used to frame this enquiry and to analyse deductively the data presented. In the discussion the researcher presented her findings against existing literature as informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

#### **5.3.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION**

##### **How does mothers' studying affect family life?**

Based on the findings of the study, this section attempted to address the main research question by relating the findings to the theoretical framework and to analyse deductively the identified themes as secondary research questions. The study aimed to explore and

describe the effect of mothers' studying on family life and based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the systems within which the effect of the mother's studies was experienced were located. In order to answer the primary research question, the researcher chose to revisit and adapt the theoretical framework (Figure 5.1) as informed by the findings of my study. In the discussion, the researcher described how the different systems were influenced by the mother's studying. Below is a diagrammatical representation of the revisited theoretical framework.



**Figure 5.1: Systems influence on the mother's studying**

The most significant systems that emerged from the study were the micro and mesosystem. The family's overall experiences with the mother's studying were felt in this context and it influenced the relationships in this family. The pressure the mother experienced from the competing demands of multiple roles was very much influenced by the support she received within the family system as well as support from the mesosystem. The school, extended family, peers, institution and workplace were located in the mesosystem. All these systems form interrelated and interconnected developmental contexts and emerged as most influential on the mother's studying. However, it is important to note that in this study, the microsystem and the mesosystem were the systems mostly affected and this is where the researcher chose to focus. From the review of literature, non-traditional students generally report that pursuing educational studies is a struggle for personal, academic, financial and emotional survival and these challenges were located in the different systems. Additionally, in a study done by Sperling (1991) on the experiences of women in universities, it was found

that these students experience a number of challenges such as family and household commitments, in addition to the demands of the student role.

### **5.3.1.1 Microsystem level**

Davies, Osborne and Williams (2002) state that non-traditional students, especially women, faces many barriers, for instance, financial costs of study, multiple roles, time management, issues and commitments related to childcare. Likewise, Reay (2003) also mentions the juggling of extensive working commitments or childcare and domestic responsibilities alongside studying. These findings emerged as important subthemes within the various systems. In this study, it was found that the family seemed to experience the mother's studying as a protective and a risk factor. A protective factor highlights what kept the family functional and strong despite the studies. While the risk factors highlighted the negative experiences of the family. Thus, the protective factors shows the positive experiences of the family.

The son did not experience the mother's studying in a positive light. What emerged very strongly was that all members of the family believed that they would benefit because there were future financial rewards associated with the mother's studies which were viewed as investments. It is this belief that led to the family to make sacrifices for the mother. Plageman (2011, p.92) posits that "family influence on degree attainment is often measured using the constructs of emotional and instrumental support." This mother enjoyed emotional and instrumental support from her family and this seemed to alleviate the pressures of her multiple roles.

### **5.3.1.2 Influence of studying on family relationships**

The concept of family resilience emerged very strongly in this family. Walsh (2003, p.1) defines resilience as "the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges" and involves processes of "positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity." She goes on to say that when families respond successfully to crises and persistent challenges they are able to recover and grow from these experiences.

Although some families are devastated when faced with any kind of adversity or hardship, what emerged as remarkable in this family was the strong relationship bond, good communication lines, husband and wife unity. "Open communication, supported by a climate of mutual trust, empathy, and tolerance for differences enables members to share a wide range of feelings that can, be aroused by crisis events amid chronic stress" (Walsh, 2003,

p.13). This family communicated with each other and this was evident in the openness they shared with each other. These resources strengthened the family and this made it easier for them to cope and to raise their children well.

Resilience is noticed when individuals are experiencing adversity in their life or environment (Mampane, 2005, p8). She further states that research into resilience emphasises the interactive nature of the individual and their environment, in this case, the family. Of particular significance in the construct of resilience is that the individual has a positive outlook on life, has future goals and sees the glass as half full instead of half empty (Mampane, 2011). Similarly, Beavers and Hampson (1990, cited in Walsch, 2003, p.8) posits that high-functioning families have been found to hold a more optimistic view of life.

The researcher refers to the daughter who showed signs of resilience by finding a way of spending time with her mother by also doing her school work while the mother was engaged in studies. Despite having negative experiences with her mother's studies, the daughter still maintained her focus for her own future, which included studying to become a doctor. This shows healthy development despite adversity, culminating in "healthy adaptation and growth" (Mampane 2011, p.30). The mother commented that her daughter felt proud of the fact she her mother studied and this further shows that, despite the struggles she endured as a result of her mother's studies, there were no signs of resentment. In this regard, Masten (1994, p.40) states that "through external behaviour good adaptation becomes competence and social adjustment, while poor adaptation refers to antisocial behaviour and maladjustment."

Family relationships were influenced by the mother's studies and her absence was keenly felt by the children. Both put structures in place to help the children adapt to the changes the mother's studies brought about. The concept of resilience is explored in more detail later on.

### **5.3.1.3 Roles within the family**

Merrill (1999) states that most women's lives are characterised by a juggling of roles. Van Meter (1982, p.134) states that married female students have higher levels of role strain and higher reports of "... poor health, lack of emotional support from the family, and lower levels of marital satisfaction." Similarly, Barnett and Baruch (1985) found married mothers experienced more role strain, which is likely a result of more rigid standards for themselves in their roles of mother and wife. Thus, it is apparent that managing multiple roles is a stressful experience and the mother felt the pressure of managing time amidst her multiple roles. However, Seiber (1974, cited in Akporaor, 2009) identified four positive outcomes of

having multiple active roles: "... (1) role privileges, (2) overall status security, (3) resources for status enhancement, (4) enrichment of the personality and ego gratification" (p.569).

Similarly, in this study, in the mother, student and gender role, there were many positive influences that made it possible for her to enjoy the success she felt in her student role. In the microsystem, the wife, mother and gender-specific roles were prominent.

Guldner (1978, cited in Akporaror, 2009) found that spouses, most usually men, have heightened emotional and jealous reactions to their partner's new independence, thereby increasing the role strain felt by the student spouse. In contrast, in this study, this was not the case at all. However, what emerged in the the wife role was the strain the couple felt to make private time for each other. Despite this challenge, they were strong together and found ways to cope. Grawitch and Borchert, (2009), define coping as "cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by the stressful transaction."

In her mother role, she was strong, she used her time productively by keeping her children occupied with her while she was busy with her studies. As mentioned earlier, she made time to spend with each child individually.

The mother had difficulty juggling her multiple responsibilities and experienced a strong sense of guilt because of her absence from her family. The father expressed the difficulty of the many responsibilities he had and the children simply longed for their mother. Interestingly, however, this family had many protective factors in the home, which made it possible for the mother to study and the family to adapt. Mampane (2011) states that protective factors help individuals to adapt and prevent them from maladaptive outcomes. For example, in her mother role, she is strong, which is evident in the time she makes to spend with each child individually. In addition to resilience, family cohesion, family commitment and support allowed this family to gain alternative ways of coping.

In a study done by Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) they talked about gendered expectation, they found that the majority of women had to take care of their children, and be responsible for the household chores because their partners believed that these responsibilities were "women's work. In this family, the researcher found the opposite: in the gender-specific role, there was a case of role reversal whereby the father assumed the mother's role in order to give her enough time and space to study. A constant pressure for



the mother was the issue of time amidst her multiple roles and this role reversal was crucial for her studies.

#### **5.3.1.4 Forms of support experienced**

The mother enjoyed emotional and instrumental support from her family, which made it possible for her to study. What emerged was the family's acknowledgement and accommodation of the mother's studying as seen by the amount of support they offered her. Thus, even though the mother in this study experienced many educational struggles, alas, not to the extent of the mothers in some of the literature reviewed, it was found that this mother had the support of her family.

The family in this study seemed to have formed connections between the mother's studies, her work and their future. This helped them to understand the benefits the mother's studies have for them. The father recognises the future investment in her studying because she is already contributing more and therefore endures her studies and subsequently provides her with the necessary support to advance herself. Evidence of this assumption is found in (Sullivan, 2006, p.62, in Plageman, 2011, p.68), "when women are employed in full-time jobs, with higher earning power relative to their partners, it appears that their male partners are likely to contribute more to domestic work." The children also recognised their personal gain from the mother's studies and this helped them to persevere and make the necessary sacrifices.

Macewen and Barling (1988, p.248) state that "various sources and types of support differentially moderate interrole conflict", for instance, they talk about emotional and instrumental support and where or whom it comes from, be it friends, family or managers at work and whether it is a high or low level of support. They go on to say that in order for the support to be effective, it must be aligned to the stressor. For example, if the mother were experiencing difficulty with managing her studies and doing the household chores, then providing emotional support simply would not be helpful to her, she would need instrumental support.

Moss (2004) states that women who study continuously have to create space and time, for their studies. In terms of time management, time with extended family and friends was affected as she often had to turn down social invitations so she would have extra time to study, this was especially prevalent during exam time. Her friends understood and respected her studies, especially when she was not able to attend social functions and the family went without her.

### **5.3.1.5 Mesosystem**

The mesosystem consists of microsystems and thus focuses on all the interactions in the microsystem involving an individual. An example of the relations between work and all the events influences the individual.

### **5.3.1.6. Influence on extended family and peer relationships**

From the data it emerged that relationships in the mesosystem with extended family and friends were positively and negatively affected as a result of the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of systems. Her husband's family were able to identify with her studies since many of them had also studied so they had an understanding of her experiences with studying. However, she did not have a close relationship with her own family and the family specifically did not share in her educational pursuit.

### **5.3.1.7 Role influence**

In her student role, the mother had a positive influence on the children and this invariably influenced their own performance at school. The children were performing well at school and the mother believed that her own values, dedication and commitment to her studies were rubbing off on the children, so, in this sense she saw herself as a role model for her children.

The student role had positive and negative outcomes for the mother, the lack of time meant that she spent less time with extended family and friends. However, she had successes as a student and was even thinking of post-graduate studies.

Employment was met with negative and positive outcomes. Giancola, Grawitch and Borchert (2009, p.258) contends that "work may be a stronger source of stress due to its integral role in the life of an adult student" and a possible reason for this could be the limited control students have over their work situation. A student may be able to make sacrifices and negotiate demands in their family and social lives or miss out on certain social activities, find help with taking care of a child or other personal responsibilities, but they are not likely to have the same level of control in their workplace. In this sense, Riekert (2005) contends that women who work are constantly moving between two systems, the work system and the family system, in this sense, each system will have its own demands which will require constant negotiation between work and family. Changing jobs affected her studies negatively; so much so that time management, work-related challenges, financial pressures

all affected her studies. However, her manager also studied so she supported the mother emotionally.

### **5.3.1.8 Extended family and peer support**

When resilience is viewed from an ecological perspective, Walsh (2003, p.3) states that there are many “recursive influences involving the individuals, families and larger social systems. Furthermore, she says that, the “family, peer, group, community resources, school or work settings can be seen as nested contexts for nurturing and reinforcing resilience. In this case, support was limited and at times non-existent. For instance, the mother commented that the family had some degree of instrumental support from her husband’s family and she also had emotional support from them because they could identify with her studies because some of them had also studied. During the holidays, the father and children went to visit the father’s sister and this created time for the mother to study. However, from her family of origin, emotional and instrumental support was non-existent, albeit not in the form the mother expected. For instance, when she spoke about her progress she was making with her studies, her father dismissed it and changed the discussion to talk about her brother’s success, yet, he often invited the children to spend time with him during the holidays and this created time for husband and wife to spend time together with him. This can be perceived as support for the mother.

She had emotional and instrumental support from their friends, however, she felt a strong sense of guilt and conflict as a result of her time away from her family and did not want to take advantage or burden people with her children, so this in turn placed more strain on the couple, in particular. The school principal was a friend of hers and offered her the use of classroom to study for exams so she would have private, uninterrupted time for her studies; this is another example of support from the mesosystem.

There were many negative experiences with the institution she was enrolled at. These challenges mostly related to the inefficient administration which was a source of much frustration for the mother. Osborne et al. (2004) state that in some institutions, non-traditional students are not a priority. In a study conducted by Rowlands (2010), it was found that institutional support often fails to address student needs adequately. Sperling (1991) states that policies alone will not assist the non-traditional student experience, what is needed and recommended is the universities should assist female non-traditional students with basic domestic and logistical problems they encounter. Some of the suggestions made in this study on how institutions could assist non-traditional students include family events, orientations to improve family support, flexible timetabling and assignment scheduling. It

was also reported that support from family was most beneficial for the non-traditional student and support from ones workplace could also help non-traditional students to cope better with their multiple roles.

She also enjoyed emotional support from her work place; however, there was no financial support which was much needed. In the mesosystem, the school principal who was a friend of her offered for her to make use of one of the classrooms in the school during exam time so she could work, this could be perceived as support for her studies.

The primary research was: The effect of the mother's studying on family life. To answer the primary research question, the following secondary research questions were fully explored against current literature in order to answer the main research question.

### **5.3.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

#### **What are the experiences of the family regarding mother's studying?**

Through the stories told by the family members in this study, it was possible to gain a picture of the family's experiences. It emerged that experiences were both positive and negative.

#### **❖ Positive experiences**

It was mainly the father, mother and the daughter who had positive experiences of the mother's studying. The son did not express any positive experiences about the mother's studying. What emerged as a positive experience in the family microsystem are the role reversals where the father continued with family roles and responsibilities when the mother was not able to fulfil such roles.

Kaufman (2000) states that gender role attitudes have evolved over the past decades to such an extent that there is more approval of wives and mothers working and that men should share in the household chores. Thus, even though the mother's absence was felt what was core was the fact that the father was instrumental in maintaining the normal everyday functioning of the family and its activities, for example, taking care of the children, driving them around, preparing meals and taking care of household chores. Riekert (2005) states that mothers often complain about exhaustion and lack of time when fathers do not share in the household responsibilities. In this case, what emerged was that the father considered himself to be the primary caregiver, so the vacuum the mother's absence created was lessened because his responsibilities were centred around the children and household chores. This created a sense of normalcy and routine in the home, which was important for healthy family functioning. At this point, the researcher uses the concept of

flexibility as defined by Olson (2000) and the researcher's believes will explain the relevance of consistency in families when they experience change. Flexibility concerns itself with change and how systems balance stability when confronted with change. In this case, there is a change in roles whereby the roles of the father and mother are reversed, flexibility will determine how well the family copes and adjusts to that change. Folkman (1984, p.843, cited in Giancola et al., 2005, p.249) define coping as "cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by the stressful transaction.

Gizir (2004, p.5) found that there is no "universal, commonly accepted definition of resilience. However, in almost all definitions "a central notion exists that resilience, as a dynamic process, involves successful coping and positive adaptation or the development of competence in the face of a significant risk, adversity or trauma. Similarly, Theron and Dunn (2010) state that resilience is the adaptive behaviour displayed by an individual when faced with challenging circumstances. The researcher discussed the daughter's resilience earlier, and resilience also extended to the rest of the family because they too adapted to the challenges and were able to overcome these challenges through the coping strategies employed. Even though studying had a somewhat negative experience on them, it did not manage to affect them adversely and this can be viewed in a positive light. They had plans in place, time management strategies and effective communication between the mother and the rest of the family ensured that they were informed about developments around the mother's studies. Riekert (2005) states that good communication is necessary to build positive relationships because it would lead to effective problem-solving and balance in the home. For instance, the father and the daughter knew when the mother had received her books, started assignments and prepared for the examination. Another example of resilience was the daughter's adaptive behaviour, referring to the story the mother told about how, when she was engaged in studies, the daughter would join her mother by doing her school work. This meant that even though the mother was preoccupied with her own studies, the sharing of space around the table translated into spending time together. This made her happy and she had a positive experience.

What emerged as very strong in this family was the family commitment towards the mother's studies and the sacrifices they made so that she could study. It seemed that the mother's educational pursuit was not hers alone, but rather a family endeavour which they all have committed to. They have an understanding that the whole family will benefit once she qualifies. Here pursuit of studies is viewed as a family investment and positive future goals are attached to the current family sacrifices. This sentiment is shared with a study

conducted by Scott et al. (1996) where the authors report that studies benefit student mothers as well as their families. However, Kelly (1982, 1987, cited in Scott et al. 1996) states that benefits are not restricted to financial gains only and these will be explored under the student role.

#### ❖ **Negative experiences**

Issues related to the negative experiences of the family were prevalent in the data. All participants conveyed strong negative experiences during the discussions. For instance, the children spoke about missing their mother, feeling angry, sad, the mother related feelings of guilt, feeling torn while the father stated that it was difficult for him because of the bigger role he has to play in terms of care giving. All family members shared the same sentiment that the mother's absence was felt and as a result the children longed for her attention.

There were financial challenges because her workplace did not finance her studies and this meant that the financial resources were strained. This resulted in the family having to make sacrifices in order to have money for the mother's studies. The mother also had the challenge of changing jobs and working long hours and this seemed to interfere with family and study time. Giancola et al. (2005, p.259) say that "garnering support from one's family for school and ensuring that school does not interfere with work may be key to alleviating an adult student's stress.

A definite issue raised by the family was the also the stress of examinations. A recurring challenge for the mother which contributed to her negative experience was the issue of time, this correlates with Moss (2004) who posits that women who are pursuing higher education are constantly trying to create space and time for their studies.

The administration at the institution where the mother is enrolled seemed to offer an inefficient service and this caused frustration and a certain amount of uncertainty on the mother's part.

### **5.3.3 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

#### **How does the mother's studying influence family relationships?**

The study indicates that family functioning is centred on relational aspects. Here the influence of studying is indicated by strained relationships between mother and father, mother and daughter and mother and son. Similarly, the mother has developed strategies to compensate for strained relationships, this is seen as she invested more time in giving quality time to her children rather than the quantity of time as required by them. However,

time is a measure of when and how relationships are affected for example during exam time when the mother basically withdraws from family life in order to create more time for her studies.

#### **5.3.3.1 Nuclear family**

From the discussion with the participants it was evident that there was a definite strain on the relationships in the family during exam time, relationships were impacted negatively so much so that it appeared that the family undergoes a temporary separation from the mother and after her exams and there needs to be re-integration of the family. During exam time the mother spent a considerable time away from the family and the home and the children missed her presence in the home, this led to the mother making the comment that after exams she had to make up for lost time with the children.

It shows that maintaining healthy family relationships is important to the mother and the rest of the family. In her quest for academic studies, despite the challenges with time constraints, the mother created family time where she does special things for each family member respectively, for example cooking on Friday nights with her husband, bath time with her son and girls day with the daughter. Albeit, the Friday night arrangement is dependent on the demands of her studies and is subject to cancellation should the mother have study demands for instance assignments or having to study for exams. Walsh (2003) states that flexibility is a core process in resiliency.

An important facet of this theme is that it highlights the effect of the separation the mother's studies is having on them, yet, they have the profound understanding that the mother's educational attainment will help create a better life for the family. Hence, as a family they make time and space for each and they value family time together.

#### **5.3.3.2 Extended family**

Reference is made specifically to the mother's father and her siblings. The mother does not have a close relationship with them and the father has a distinct lack of interest in her studies. However, he does make time for her children and this allows the couple to spend time together. Similarly, her prolonged absence from family gatherings indicates how studies isolate her from her extended family activities. Similarly, her inability to take vacation with her family indicate how the extended family (her husband's sister) provide the support her husband requires during vacation time.

From the discussion, the husband's family has qualifications, therefore they have an understanding for the mother's studies. Plageman (2011, p.315) posits that "family is integral to a women's educational experience. Similarly, peers have respect for the mother's studies and provide support for the family, hence these relationships are positively influenced by the mother's studies. Giancola et al. (2005, p.259) state that the research shows that a student has support from family, friends, and work colleagues the negative consequences of role strain is reduced. In this sense Chartrand (1990) contends that family support has also been linked to retention in higher education.

#### **5.3.4 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

##### **How does the mother experience her multiple roles whilst studying?**

Toyin and Akporaro (2009), states that changes in roles can be stressful for both graduate and undergraduate students. Work and family roles can have either a positive or a negative effect and the addition of a student role is likely to cause strain on the family.

Giancola et al. (2005) state that an important feature in a non-traditional student's life is the stress of balancing multiple roles of work, school and family life. The authors refer to the scarcity of theory to illustrate their point in saying that returning to studies creates another role for the individual that competes for limited resources, namely the student's time, energy and finances. In this study, the data revealed issues relating to the difficulty the mother experienced with balancing her multiple roles, mother, wife, worker and student.

The experiences of the family on the mother's studying highlight the importance placed on the role of a mother by culture, family and society. Gender role theory (Bailyn 1993, Judiesch & Lyness, 1999) describes the expectations that society has of women, where men are identified as breadwinners and women as caretakers. Taken together with the motherhood mandate, Russo (1976), which asserts that for a woman to be successful in her woman role she must have children and spend a certain amount of time with them. Such apparent social and cultural forces are likely to impede the mother's success in her student role given the amount of time educational studies require. In contrast, this mother and family contravened such cultural, family and societal roles.

In this theme, many negative role experiences were communicated. Carney-Crompton and Tan (2010) state that some studies have found that increases in roles, demands, and time conflicts are associated with higher stress, anxiety and depression for the non-traditional female student.



Descriptions of the mother's experiences with combining multiple roles in the home, work and institution revealed aspects of role conflict. Similarly, Coser and Coser (1974, in Balmer & Cozby, 1985) categorised family and education as 'greedy institutions' which demand high degrees of energy, time and commitment. These authors ask the question; can a marriage survive when the wife discovers her brain?

In the wife role, the researcher found a case of role reversal in the sense that the father assumed the role of mother and father, in fact, even the daughter made the comment that the father was like a mother and father to them. In contrast, the researcher refers to a study done by Kaufman (2000) on gender role attitudes in which she states that men's and women's attitudes about gender have changed significantly as both men and women are more inclined to agree that mothers and women should work and men should help with the household work. She further states that egalitarian men are busier "doing family" than "doing gender. These men support their wives more, are more involved with their children, allow for equitable decision-making and do more house work. Egalitarian men are not threatened by their partner's participation in the workforce. In any case, most women prefer to have husbands who are willing to share in the household responsibilities, taken together, this kind of attitude is likely to affect family dynamics and in a sense benefit the family because it has more to do with role responsibility than with gender. It is not clear that Kaufman (2000) wondered if the father in this study was not egalitarian.

However, the statement about the husband being "gatvol" cannot be ignored. She made the comment that as a wife and being married for 16 years she knows what "gatvol looks like. It was also unclear what the communication pattern between this couple was. Reference is made to the study conducted by Taniguchi and Kaufman (2013) who state that Japanese couples engage in indirect communication, whereby they do not communicate openly or express their feelings to their partners. This is seen as a way to limit conflict and enhance harmony in the marriage. At no time did the husband verbalise any resentment or ill feelings towards his wife, not to her directly nor to the researcher. In a western context, this kind of communication pattern could be perceived as "maladaptive (Taniguchi, & Kaufman, 2013). However, if one refers to the resilient nature of this family, then Walsh's (2003, p.13) statement about a resilient family holds true, she states that collaborative problem-solving and conflict management are essential for family resilience.

Much if not all of the experiences of the mother in this study, is in agreement with current literature of non-traditional students and multiple role conflict. The mother who is engaged in academic studies is involved in more than one system simultaneously, namely, the

institution, children's school, workplace, church, etc. Bronfenbrenner's (1979a, p.9.), ecological theory posits that the "sharing by family members of a social role (e.g., worker, student) that originates outside the family can provide a basis for effects at the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem levels. Thus, the family, the institution and the workplace in this study, are significant microsystems for the mother. As the mother moves between the different systems she has a role to fulfil, each role places demands on the mother which results in role conflict. When there is lack of time and energy to meet the demands of all these roles, this results in role overload (Home, 1998).

In student role which the mother shares with her children emerged as a positive influence because of its influence on the children's attitudes and interest towards learning. Several authors refer to the positive role modelling of mothers who study. For instance, Haleman (2004, in Mottarella, Fritzsche, Whitten, & Bedsole, 2009, p.224) maintains that mothers who study usually report that "pursuing postsecondary education provides important modelling to their children. This notion is further supported by Aiken, Cervero and Johnson-Bailey (2001) and Coker (2003, in Plageman, 2011) who state that even though students confirmed the importance of their student role, educational attainment also meant that they could be role models for their children and their community. In this sense, the family and community system is likely to be influenced by the mother's educational attainment.

Many student mothers reported that at they were better able to help their children with their school work, to offer better advice about difficulties with homework and to be more understanding of the problems their children faced as students. They also remarked that their children, especially daughters, were more serious about their studies and more motivated to continue their education and as a result of the role model the mother provided (Scott et al., 1996).

Exam time was particularly strenuous for the family. In fact, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) state that choosing the student role during exam time or when having to work on an assignment can be challenging. They go on to say, that research has shown that women have the desire to fulfil the wife, mother and student role but receive less support from these roles.

However, the student role also appeared to have some benefit for the children. Christopher (2005) and Dyk (1987) talk about a blending of student and parent roles, they go on to say that mothers who are students are likely to influence their children's attitudes towards school. Thus, the children observe the mother in her mother role within the microsystem and

then observe her in her student role within the mesosystem. This is a positive factor because, according to the mother, her children are performing well at school, even the teachers are giving her good feedback regarding her children's performance, so obviously she is a good role model for her children.

However, what was also evident and I have mentioned it earlier is the mother's motivation for pursuing academic studies. (Payne et al., 2007; Bye, Puhkar & Conway, 2007; Dupeyrat, & Marine, 2005, in Ricco et al., 2009, p.102) posit that extrinsic motivation for academic pursuits such as studying towards improving ones income or a better job can convey positive messages such as success and academic efficacy, however, it can also have negative connotations for parent and child when studying or furthering ones education is seen as "a means to an end", this can lead to the inherent value of educational attainment being reduced in the process. In this case, this risk can be managed if the mother completes this degree and continues to pursue post-graduate studies, and she makes academic progress, then her academic success is likely to affect her children's educational aspirations positively. I refer to the work of (Newman 1999a, 1999b; Rosier, 2000, cited in Ricco et al., 2009, p.102), who make a relevant point that, "role models must succeed, as well as attempt to succeed educationally, to have positive consequences for those who are observing them. Ricco et al. (2009, p.102) found that "in families in which mothers successfully completed their undergraduate degrees following the return to school, most or all of the children also completed college by early adulthood."

Due to the negative experiences the children have as a result of the mother's studies, there is the possibility of risks arising. The children have, however, displayed a positive adaptation and coping despite the challenges.

#### ❖ **Gender specific role**

Macewen and Barling (1988, p.248) state that "interrole conflict is associated with lower family and marital adjustment." This family did not subscribe to the old notions of fathers as breadwinners and mother's homemakers. I found that the father basically assumed the role of the mother and took over the care taking of the children as well as household duties so that the mother could have time for her studies. In this sense, father took on the mother role. Thus, within the family system, role reversal is clearly emphasised where family cohesion is enforced by the father who comes in to fulfil the roles that were delegated to the mother. The mother is empowered by the support enforced by her husband and the family in turn influences the mother's higher educational experience positively. Although the father and the children reported strong negative experiences to the mother's studies, it is the belief that

the many resources the family has in terms of the relationship they share with each other and the communication patterns which exist within this family and the strong bonds, seem to have created a supportive, caring and nurturing environment for each other.

In spite of the family's negative experience, the fact they were a resilient family meant that they are strong together and support each other through collaboration and commitment. This enhanced the quality of her relationships with family. They may have had varied reactions to the mother's studies, Walsch (2003) states that in a resilient family, there is respect for each other's individual differences, for example, the differences in age of the children and the varied responses of their reactions to the mother's studies are a typical example of respect. However, in this study, the age of the children is important since only the daughter alluded to the positive influence of the mother's studying. The parents commented that the son was younger and they understood his resentment towards the mother's studies. Despite the son's good performance in the feedback provided by his teachers, he, on the other hand, did not acknowledge the influence of studying or his desire to achieve better results at school.

The relationship between the husband and wife enhanced the level of support she received from her husband. This motivated her to study even harder when she considered terminating her studies, it was her husband who motivated her to persist. While the mother spoke about feelings of guilt, she still has the joy of studying because of the commitment of the family and the strong family bond, which allow her to think about pursuing post-graduate studies later on.

#### **5.3.5 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 4**

##### **What are the forms of support for the mother who is studying?**

By referring to the ecological theory which framed this study, the family, school, church are all interrelated and interconnected which all interact recursively (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). For example, one may find therefore that favourable or unfavourable circumstances at home can impact the school. On the microsystemic level, the family as the primary environment seemed to provide the necessary support for the mother. Chartrand (1992), Dill and Henley, (1998), Sciarra and Whitson (2007, in Plageman, 2011) contend that adult female students who are pursuing undergraduate studies are likely to persist in academic studies when they have family support.

Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) offer a description of emotional and instrumental support. They define emotional support as having someone who is willing to listen, talk, care, support

and empathise. Instrumental support is having hands-on assistance with, for example, finances, childcare or household chores. In the current study, the mother had varying degrees of support, however, the most significant support base for her came from her immediate family, specifically her husband. The integration of support and sharing of household responsibilities from within the microsystem helped to alleviate role overload in the mother. Greater emotional support in the form of acceptance, encouragement, and praise and instrumental support which is financial, childcare and household is likely to reduce the negative psychological consequences associated with increased roles, demands, and conflicts can have on an individual (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2010).

It is evident from the data that without support, educational attainment in the midst of a family role and worker role is not likely to happen. If support is what she needs, “then so be it” as Riekert (2005) succinctly puts it; in this study the factors that contributed to her managing her studies was family support.

The mother relied on the husband for support and felt supported by him. What was surprising was the children’s recognition and acknowledgement of the father’s contribution in terms of care giving and household responsibilities. This support is evident in the instrumental support he provides by way of taking care of the children and attending to all household chores. He also provides psychological support. The children assist with chores as well as the domestic helper who comes in once a week.

From the data it emerged support for the mother’s studies from the extended family is limited in respect of the assistance they receive from the husband’s family, and non-existent from the mother’s father and siblings. The family, specifically the husband recognises this. The family do not rely on outside support and this might possibly be a reason why he contributes even more. However, while the mother’s father did not support her in her educational pursuits, he did make time for her children by taking them away on holiday, this indirect form of support could free up time for the couple to spend some alone time together in light of the substantial amount of time the mother spends studying. Peers also offer support by taking care of the children from time to time.

Through the discussion with the family, one almost feels sorry for the children and the negative experiences the children have as a result of the mother’s studies, the possibility of risks arising cannot be ignored. However, in this family, the children seemed to have displayed a positive adaptation and intrapersonal coping skills despite the challenges. The mother’s studies has affected the family, however, what supported them was the fact that

they are resilient, they made sacrifices, the strong communication and family bond that they share further ensured that they coped. The husband's role is core, he is instrumental in ensuring the wellbeing of his family and the unconditional support he provides for his wife. One wonders what would have happened if this was a single mom, but that this is outside the scope of this study.

In conclusion, what was evident in this study was the heavy demands placed by family and work that studies should take second place. Often women's caring responsibilities go beyond the home and include other family members such as elderly parents and these extended responsibilities are likely to contribute to role strain on the mother. These recurring challenges often featured in the literature and was a main reason why mothers often discontinue their studies.

#### **5.4 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study contributes to an existing body of knowledge on women non-traditional students. It contributes towards understanding the complex, unique experiences this student population faces. As a case study, it allowed for the participants to relate their very personal experiences and to give voice to the effect the mother's studies had on them. A further contribution is that it highlights the various levels within the social system that influences and effects non-traditional students educational experience, in this case, higher education institution and workplace, extended family, peers, school and church. In this way, institutions might become more sensitive to the needs of non-traditional students in creating enabling environments and support structures for these students.

#### **5.5 POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Considering that this was a case study, generalisability cannot be assumed. However, since this was a qualitative, interpretivist study, the aim was not to generalise but rather to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

As a mother, wife and non-traditional student the researcher had to be cognisant of her own experiences. This was countered this by reflecting on the researcher's personal views and to control for possible researcher bias. Discussions were also held with the researcher's experienced supervisor to counter the effects my feelings and emotions might have on this study.

The age of the children, specifically the son, seemed to be a limitation in this study. Although he did convey some of his experiences around the mother's studies, he seemed to struggle to verbalise his feelings. Again, the methodology limitation of doing interviews with the son instead of an activity like a collage is noted. Even though the environment of the interview was familiar (home), the son was reserved and less communicative.

## 5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations for future research are made:

- ❖ The family saw the financial benefit of the mother's studies once she qualified, in order to bring closure, it would be interesting to return to the family in a couple of years' time, to see if the mother's studies had indeed changed their financial situation and how they have benefited from their sacrifice. This would validate their resilience as a family and the positive outcomes.
- ❖ A second study area would be to conduct similar research with a larger family where there are more children and the age group is different to the age of the children in this study.
- ❖ Comparative studies with a different race group to see if there are differences in the effect the mother's studies have on family life and then to compare it to this study.

## 5.7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The topic of this research project was personal. The mother in this study was eager right from the start to share her story with me. When I first approached her, her words to me was: *"Anything to help a sister who is studying.* The family shared her enthusiasm to be a part of this study and they related their experiences in the bravest way. This family adapted to the stressors created by the mother's studies because they showed strength in the face of adversity. When the mother was not able to juggle her multiple roles, the father easily took over most of her roles and responsibilities. The support the husband provided for his wife lessened the mother's stressor and allowed her to study and concentrate on her studies. The family has a positive outlook for a brighter future. So, in attempting to answer the questions posed earlier, "Can a marriage survive when the wife discovers her brain?" In this case, I think most definitely yes.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**

**Appendix B**

**Appendix C**

**Appendix D**

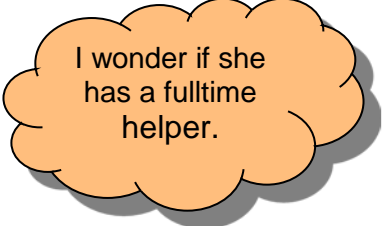
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## APPENDIX A

The following are short notes/reflections/observations of the interview with the family

It's a Saturday morning, when I arrive at the family home, family is expecting me. Everyone welcomes and the mother introduces as Tannie Pramesh(Aunty Pramesh). She reminds them about the discussion she had with them which tells me that they have discussed this. Meanwhile, I scan the living room quickly, I hear the noise of the washing machine on in the background.

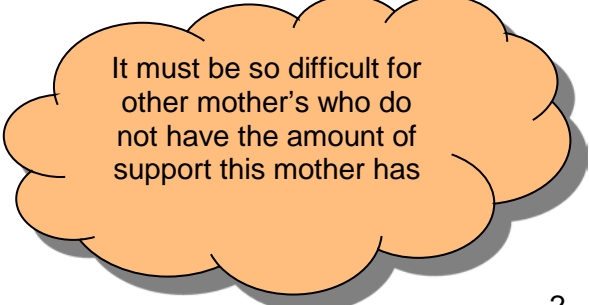
A thought bubble with an orange background and a black outline, containing the text "I wonder if she has a fulltime helper."

I wonder if she has a fulltime helper.

I explain to the family the reason for my visit and how we proceed with the discussion. The children are excited and wait with anticipation

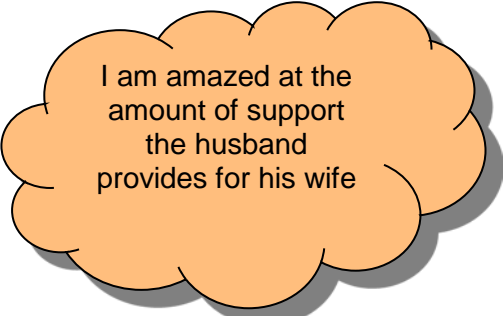
Family agree, mother would be interviewed first, then father and children.

The mother relates her story, easy interviewing the her, willingness and honesty to talk openly. Her sole support is basically her husband and at no time does it show that she doubts his dependability or his withdrawal of support. Twice during the interviews, the son comes into the room and goes to sit close to his mother, she asks him politely to go and play in the other room, he leaves unwillingly. Is he looking for his mother's attention? He is still young.

A thought bubble with an orange background and a black outline, containing the text "It must be so difficult for other mother's who do not have the amount of support this mother has".

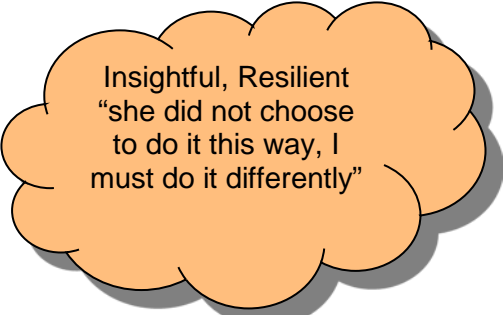
It must be so difficult for other mother's who do not have the amount of support this mother has

I interview the husband next, he talks about the difficulty he has with having to take on most of the caregiving and household responsibilities. Makes many sacrifices for her, everything he does is centred around making time so his wife can study, taking most of the burden of her so she can study.




I am amazed at the amount of support the husband provides for his wife

The interview with the daughter is interesting, she is mature beyond her years and expresses herself clearly. She misses her mother but has found a way to spend time with her mother, she studies and does her homework with her mother. She talks about her father, "he is like a mother and a father".



Insightful, Resilient  
"she did not choose to do it this way, I must do it differently"

I interview the son last, immediately I realise I should have interviewed him first, he looks tired, and I struggle to get to him talk, I wonder if he is not too young to be interviewed, limitation. What comes out very clear is his negative feelings towards his mother's studies, he knows what exams are and what happens when the mother is busy with exams. He articulates this clearly.



I feel sorry for the children, all they want is their mother's time and attention

## APPENDIX B

Transcriptions

## APPENDIX C

### Themes from Transcriptions

## Appendix C

### Themes from transcriptions

#### 1. Family's experiences

##### **Protective factors**

- ❖ Good supportive relationships
- ❖ Positive experiences
- ❖ Husband strong leadership, support
- ❖ Time management
- ❖ Rules enforced by family
- ❖ Commitment
- ❖ Motivation
- ❖ Resiliency
- ❖ Coping strong
- ❖ Clear, consistent communication

##### **Risk Factors**

- ❖ Negative experiences
- ❖ Prolonged separation from children
- ❖ Financial
- ❖ Disruption of family life
- ❖ Routine(less family time)
- ❖ Family social life is disrupted/social gatherings, church, family gatherings

#### 2. Family relationships

- ❖ Strong emotional bonds
- ❖ Family time

#### 3. Roles within family

- ❖ Father – playing dual roles
- ❖ Mother –strong in her mother/student role
- ❖ Wife role-challenges

#### 4. Support

- ❖ Family support -Husbands support strong
- ❖ Extended family-Family of origin-not supportive
  - In laws-support
- ❖ Peers - supportive
- ❖ Workplace - support

##### **Revised Themes**

Theme 1	Sub Theme
Family's Experience	Protective factor
	Risk factor

Theme 2	Sub Theme
Family Relationships	Nuclear family
	Risk factor
	Extended family/peers

Theme 3	Sub Theme
Roles	Wife Role
	Mother Role
	Student Role
	Gender Role

Theme 4	Sub Theme
Support	Nuclear family
	Risk factor
	Extended family/peers

## **APPENDIX D**

Appendix D  
Informed consent form  
Appendix D1  
Permission Letters



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

**Faculty of Education**  
**Department of Educational Psychology**

26 September 2013

Dear

Invitation to participate

Juggling family and study: The effect of mothers' studying on family life

As a masters student at the department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, I have to conduct a research study under the supervision of a senior lecturer to partial fulfil my masters degree. The results of this study will be submitted to the University of Pretoria in the form of a dissertation. The aim of this project is to explore how family life is possibly influenced when the mother is engaged in academic studies. By engaging with the family I aim to gain a more indepth understanding of the mother's experiences in her multiple roles of mother, wife and student and the issues that may confront her. This study may lead to an increase in the literature of the challenges women, but more specifically mothers face in pursuit of academic qualifications for self improvement as well as well-being of family so that higher institutions will be more aware of the unique needs of non-traditional students when developing academic programs.

I am asking for your participation in this study. As a research participant you will be required to take part in an interview lasting approximately 1 hour but not longer than 4 hours with you alone, and then each member of the family separately. To this purpose I will use an audio tape to ensure accuracy of responses. I will also be making notes during the interviews. You are welcome to review the transcripts before they are included in the study. A follow up



interview might be needed to be scheduled in order to clarify or expand on a particular issue which I have identified but prior arrangements will be made with you. I also request of you to maintain a journal of your experiences during the course of your studies which I will use in the research with utmost discretion.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you will not be coerced or manipulated in any way to participate or provide certain information. You can at any time decide that you and your family do not wish to continue or be part of this study and your decision will be respected and your information withdrawn from this study.

#### Confidentiality and Anonymity

I am bound by the integrity and ethical conduct as prescribed by the University of Pretoria. Therefore, all information provided to me as the researcher will be kept in the strictest confidence and will be only used for the purpose of the research. You are not required to provide your names or contact details in any of the correspondence, and will remain anonymous throughout. As the researcher, I will be the only individual privy to the actual identities of my participants. Pseudonyms will be used within the research report where necessary.

Date.....

Researcher's signature.....

Appendix D1

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

I, ..... (chosen pseudonym) have read the above information contained in the “Invitation to Participate” and would like to voluntarily participate in this research study. I am aware of what is expected of me and that I may withdraw at any time should I feel in any way, uncomfortable or misled. By signing this form I give consent to avail myself and my family for interviews when required, record any discussion and information relevant to this research study. I further acknowledge that I am participating of my own free will and have not been in any way forced, misled, manipulated or coerced into taking part. I also give consent to the publication of the research findings, subject to anonymity and confidentiality.

Participant signature.....

Date.....

Researchers signature.....

## LETTER OF INFORMED ASSENT

I, ..... (chosen pseudonym) understand the purpose of this research as explained to me by the researcher in the presence of my parents and would like to voluntarily participate in this research study. I am aware of what is expected of me and that I may withdraw at any time should I feel in any way, uncomfortable or misled. By signing this form I give consent to record any discussion and information relevant to this research study. I further acknowledge that I am participating of my own free will and have not been in any way forced, misled, manipulated or coerced into taking part.

Participant signature.....

Date.....

Researchers signature.....