

## CHAPTER 3

# WHAT ARE THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE NEEDS AND THE EXPECTATIONS OF ORPHANED LEARNERS?

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present and illustrate the results of data collected and the themes that emerged from interviewing the orphaned learner. I report the results of the interviews by telling the story of three of the twelve orphaned learners that I interviewed. I chose these stories as they represent the three different life worlds in which the orphaned learners in this study live. These stories are that of

- an orphaned learner who lives with her aunt and the uncle
- an orphaned learner who lives with her grandmother
- an orphaned learner who lives in a child-headed family

#### Story 1

*Nomsa is twelve years old. She is in Grade 6. Her mother died in 2000 and her father died in 2001. After the death of her parents, Nomsa moved to her grandmother's house. She said, "we were staying nice with my grandmother". They depend on the Child Support Grant<sup>12</sup> that the grandmother receives from the government. The grandmother died in 2002. Nomsa then went to live with her aunt and uncle. Although her aunt and uncle buy food and clothes and give her pocket money she is not receiving grants from the government. Nomsa says that "I am getting good education, and there are things that I do not understand in class but I am afraid to ask the educator". She likes school because she has friends with whom she plays during break time.*

*When she has a problem, she tells her aunt. Nomsa said "she does not feel comfortable sharing her problems with educators". She wants to be a social*

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<sup>12</sup> The Child Support Grant is monthly cash transfers of R180 aimed at supporting poor children younger than 14 years whose caregivers' total income do not exceed R1100 per month (Case, Hosegood & Lund, 2005). In the Budget Speech 2007 the Minister of Finance announced an increment in the Child Support Grant from R180 to R200 per month (*Pretoria News*).

*worker when she grows up so that she can help other orphans get grants and a good education (Appendix H).*

## Story 2

*Lerato is fourteen years old and in Grade 8. She and her brother and sister are living with their grandmother. Lerato's mother passed away in 2002. Lerato does not know her father because her father abandoned them when she was still young. Nobody has told her about her father or her father's relatives. Lerato's mother was a soldier. Lerato says that when her mother was still alive life was good. Her mother came home every weekend with a big plastic bag full of things. She gave them everything they needed and wanted.*

*When her mother died, Lerato went to live with her aunt and uncle while her other siblings stayed with their grandmother. One day one of her cousins broke the television set and accused her of doing it. Lerato's aunt told her uncle and she was beaten for breaking the television set. Lerato felt that she was being ill treated and decided to go and stay with her grandmother. A year after moving to live with her grandmother her three-year-old brother died after a long illness.*

*Lerato's grandmother is a domestic worker. Sometimes there is no money to buy food and Lerato goes to school without breakfast. On such days she relies on the bread that the school occasionally gives to orphaned learners. Lerato's family has an evening meal regularly. She does not get along with her peers and she feels that her classmates hate her for no reason. Lerato does not like people who scold her, like one of her classmates. She says that her sister and brother also hate her and they fight a lot at home. Despite the sibling fights, Lerato says that her grandmother loves and cares for her and she loves her grandmother in return.*

*Lerato's sister is in college. She hopes that when her sister gets a job their life could be better. Lerato wants to go to college in future and become a policewoman so that she can help people in her community. She believes that there is a lot of crime in the country and she can make a difference. She wants to be a social worker to help orphans because she feels that relatives mistreat children who do not have parents (Appendix H).*

### Story 3

*Mpumi is fourteen years old. She is in Grade 8. She is the youngest of three sisters. The eldest sister lives with a relative. The other sister is sixteen years old and she lives with Mpumi in their mother's house. The house is small. The floor of the house is not cemented; the roof leaks when it rains and it is always cold because the windows are broken. Mpumi's mother died when she was young. Her father had a shop. She says that although her father had an income he never helped them. Their mother provided for their needs. Two weeks after her mother's death a stranger came into their shop and killed Mpumi's father. Mpumi was devastated.*

*Life has changed a lot for Mpumi since the death of her parents. She misses her parents. There are times when there is no food at home. They rely on the food they get from friends, the soup kitchen and donations from the hospital. Mpumi's aunt occasionally gives them clothes donated for the poor. Mpumi is epileptic. She gets frequent epileptic attacks and often misses school after an attack. Mpumi gets her medication from a nearby clinic. She believes that the medication from the clinic makes her fat and is not as effective as the medication from the hospital. She feels that it is unfair that she is sick and sees herself as not being beautiful like her peers. She wants to go to the hospital to get better medication.*

*Mpumi's health condition makes her feel that her family does not like her. She says that other children do not want to play with her because she will infect them with epilepsy. According to Mpumi, her classmates do not want to sit next to her in class, share stationary or do group work with her. When she tells the educator how the other learners are responding towards her, the educator moves her to another desk. One time her educator wrote a letter for her to take to a nurse who had promised her sister that she could help them get admission in a special school for children with epilepsy. When the sister went to look for the nurse she could not find her.*

*Mpumi feels insecure at home. The sister she lives with dropped out of school and always comes home with boyfriends. Mpumi is upset with her sister because there is no privacy in their house. Her sister's boyfriends have raped her twice. She fears for her safety and is concerned that there is no adult to provide protection, guidance and support. Her eldest sister tried intervening and the two sisters ended up fighting.*

*In spite of their present living conditions, Mpumi is hopeful about the future. She wants to be a nurse to help other people. She believes that her mother died in the hospital because nobody helped her when she was admitted in the hospital. Mpumi narrated the following “They did not help her, she was sick for two weeks. When she died my big sister came here and told my father. My father took me there and I saw my mother in a box” (Appendix H).*

In the following section I present significant themes that arose from the data collected during the interviews with the orphans (Appendix U – for example of coding learner’s interview). Although I interviewed six learners from each school, the significant emerging themes are presented collectively. Four main themes and 15 sub-themes emerged from the data. Table 3.1 enlists the themes and sub-themes developed from the collected data.

Table 3.1: Emerging themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1 (3.2): A world in the absence of parents	Sub-theme 1 (3.2.1): Parental longing Sub-theme 2 (3.2.2): Grieving the loss of parents Sub-theme 3 (3.2.3): Being deprived of love and care
Theme 2 (3.3): Relationship with others	Sub-theme1 (3.3.1): Relationship with relatives Sub-theme 2 (3.3.2): Relationship with educators Sub-theme 3 (3.3.3): Relationship with siblings Sub-theme 4 (3.3.4): child headed families Sub-theme 5 (3.3.5): Relationship with peers Sub-theme 6(3.3.6): Relationship with other orphans
Theme 3 (3.4): Conceptions of identities as orphans	Sub-theme 1 (3.4.1) Self-image Sub-theme 2 (3.4.2) Wanting to be/career and future expectations
Theme 4 (3.5): Financial and material needs	Sub-theme 1 (3.5.1) Nutritional needs Sub-theme 2 (3.5.2) School requirements Sub-theme 3 (3.5.3) Housing needs Sub-theme 4 (3.5.4) Medical care

I include verbatim quotations and written text of the individual orphaned learners to illustrate and support the themes.

## 3.2 THEME 1: A WORLD IN THE ABSENCE OF PARENTS

This theme describes the experiences of orphans in relation to their emotional needs in the absence of their parent/s. The theme includes how the orphaned learners feel and cope with the emotional longing for their parents. The learners' experiences include longing for the parents who have passed away and the parents who have abandoned them and are no longer responsible for their well being.

### 3.2.1 Sub-theme : Parental longing

During the interviews, most of the orphaned learners expressed an **emotional longing** for the parents who have passed away. Some learners felt frustrated because they could not remember their parents, while others who could remember their parents expressed concern that the memory of their parents seemed to be fading and it made them feel sad. The responses of the learners were as follows:

*“I do not know my mother she died when I was young” (Thandi.1.18).*

*“I do not know my parents, my mother died when I was one month” (Lindiwe.1.19).*

*“My life is not good because some days I remember her; nowadays I do not remember her and it makes me cry “(Thato.1.11).*

In some cases the father of the orphaned learners abandoned them when they were infants. When the abandoned orphans talked about missing their mothers who had passed away they also expressed feelings of **longing regarding their absent fathers**. Four learners wanted to know where their fathers were, hoping that they could one day see them. One learner was anxious to know whether his father was alive or dead. The expression of longing for their fathers might also possibly suggest loss of identity and the

lack of a bonding relationship with the father and the father's family. The following quotations indicate the views of the learners:

*"I do not know my father, nobody is telling me. I do not know his face and I do not now his relatives" (Lerato.1.85).*

*"I feel pain when I think of my father, I do not know if he is alive or dead but sometimes I ask myself a question where is my father?" (Tshepo.1.33).*

**Parental bonding** seems to be an important factor missing in the lives of some of the orphaned learners interviewed. One of the learners who seems to be longing for her parent talked of growing up not knowing her parents. The meanings attached to the concept *know* could denote many things. *Know* could indicate having a photographic image of the parents, or a sense of shared experiences with the parents. A prominent experience that appeared to be common among the orphaned learners was **associating the longing for their parents with the needs** they were being deprived of, such as food, clothes and paying for school excursions, among others. Some of the orphaned learners believed that their parents could have provided for those needs if they have been alive or if they had not abandoned them. Some emotions associated with the absence of their parents were feelings of alienation, anger, frustration, helplessness and emotional pain. These emotions are evident in the following quotations:

*"Maybe my father is a rich man, I do not know. He has a lot of money and enjoying life with another family and I am struggling here. Maybe it could be better if I knew him" (Tshepo.1.42).*

*"... Really I do not miss him. He has never bought me anything not even a shirt" (Tebogo.1.23).*

*"... I felt good because my mother was still alive and everyday she bought me something" (Thato.1.4).*

*"When you stand up they think that you cannot afford anything because you do not have a mother and a father and they think that they are going to bring everything because they have a mother and a father" (Lindiwe.1.39).*

Another orphaned learner expressed her feelings of anger towards her parents through the following:

*“My mother died when I was one month and my father when I was eleven years. Before my father died he never supported me. Now I don’t care about my parents because my uncle, sister and brother support me” (Thandi).*

From the above quotes, it appeared that the orphaned learners need emotional filling of the gap created by the death of the parents. The learners were missing their parents and they responded in different ways to this loss. For example, one learner reflected on how the mother provided for their needs while two learners expressed the opinion that they did not care about their fathers who had passed away because they did not provide for their needs when they were alive.

The notion of the orphaned learners’ emotional longing for their parents is consistent with the Sengendo and Nambi (1997) study, which revealed that many orphans were angered by their parents’ death. In their study, orphans living with relatives were likely to be more angered than those living with grandparents. The orphans living with the surviving parent were least angered. The anger of the orphans was exacerbated when they were experiencing problems. In addition to the work done by Sengendo and Nambi (1997), SCOPE-OVC/Zambia (2003) reported that what bothered the children most were that they missed their deceased parents/guardians. Makame et al., (2000) and Thompson, Kaslow, Price, Williams and Kingree (1998) confirm that more orphans in their studies tended to have internalised problems. It seems that the orphans who were likely to internalise their problems were those who did not have caring adults to confide in and those who were deprived of material resources (Makame et al., 2000). In this study, the expression of anger could have been a way in which the orphaned learners expressed their problems and their frustration with the inability to fulfil some of their needs.

### 3.2.2 Sub-theme: Grieving the loss of parents

Some of the orphaned learners talked about the loving relationship they had had with their mothers and how they grieved when their mothers died. They could **remember** details about the day their parents passed away such as the date and year, the circumstances and how they cried when they were told about their parents' death. The learners expressed their emotional state as follows:

*“When my mother died I cried a lot, I loved my mother because she loved all her children” (Lerato.1.96).*

*“The day I will not forget is 11-04-2005 because this is the day my mother passed away. When I heard that my mother died I cried and asked myself a question why did God take my mother because my mother is the person close to me” (Tshepo.1.25).*

*“It was the day they were going to bury my grandmother, my grandfather told me that my mother passed away she passed away at midnight” (Thato.1.10).*

*“My mother passed away this year (2006) in February. She was very sick. I felt very bad and cried all the time” (Tshepo.1.5 & 6).*

*“Two weeks after my mother’s burial a stranger came and killed my father at the shop. That day I became sick. When I hear bad news my heart beat faster then I get epileptic attack” (Mpumi.2.17 & 19).*

One of the orphaned learners did not want to talk about her parents, giving the reason that the memories of her parents made her feel bad. This learner’s feelings suggest that she may still be grieving and possibly has not come to terms with the death of her parents. During the drawing and writing session she drew herself and her friend and wrote that she likes playing with her friend because she does not want to think about her parents (Appendix H). Playing could also be a means of fulfilling the need to belong and of escaping from the reality of a painful experience. Willis (2002) points out that playing is a means by which children get to communicate and express themselves; therefore caregivers should encourage grieving children to play. Another orphaned learner wrote the following account of his father’s death:



***My father passed away – This is what happened.***

*My father had two girlfriends, my mother and another woman. So the other woman was very jealous because my father loved my mother the most. My father was driving; his girlfriend sat on the front seat and two other men at the back. It was nice, they were talking then one of the guys sitting at the back started to say bad things about my father. When he tried looking back at him, he shot my father on the head. The other guy drove the car and that is how my father died. He had a wound on his head. (Lebo)*

The possibility of continued grief and trauma is evident in the responses of the orphaned learners. It is possible that they could be dealing with their loss alone, with limited or no help in the grieving process. Some of the learners emotionally narrated what happened and how they grieved when their parent(s) died, while other learners were likely to internalise their feelings and block painful memories by not talking about what happened. Veal, Trocaire, Ndibeshye and Nyirimihigo (2001) reveal that many orphans in their study experienced little support in dealing with grief and the loss of their parents. The SCOPE-OVC/Zambia (2002) study indicates that children dealt with their sadness by spending their time playing with friends. The two studies, among others, support the emerging themes from this study to suggest that **some of the orphaned learners may lack support during the grieving period** and may internalise their emotions.

**3.2.3 Sub-theme: Being deprived of love and care**

Although some of the orphaned learners lived with relatives, there were **limited narrations of loving relationships and emotional support from relatives**. Although some of the learners noted that relatives bought school uniforms and food, most of the orphans did not talk of experiences of affection and caring relationships. Lerato had the following to say as she compares the relationship she had with her mother with what she was experiencing with the relatives.

*They shout too much and I do not like people shouting. My mother when I did a wrong thing, she corrected me and not shouted at me. She did not say, “Why did you do this”. She calls me and tells me what to do. Then I say “ok mum” but my relatives shout at me too much (Lerato.1.80).*

The orphaned learner’s comparison of her experiences with her mother and the experiences with the relatives suggests the nature of attachment within a relationship (Bowlby, 1988) that the learner expects from a caregiver figure. The learner’s narration may also suggest the need for a more tolerant and supportive relationship.

### **3.3 THEME 2: RELATIONSHIP WITH *OTHERS***

In this theme, *others* are the people that orphaned learners associate with. The theme is about the lived experiences of the orphans’ social interaction. In the theme of relationship with others I present findings on how the orphaned learners relate to their relatives, educators, siblings, peers and other orphans. Some of the learners expressed the opinion that *other* people hated them and treated them unfairly. Foster, Makufa, Drew, Mashumba and Kambeu (1997) report that the majority of the orphans in their study stated that they were being treated differently from others. The orphans narrated how people in the community laughed at them and gave them nicknames. In the current study some of the orphans had similar experiences. For example, one learner voiced that she did not like to receive things from other people because of the accompanying stigma. Several orphaned learners perceived themselves as *me* against *others* and felt like outsiders. The following expressions articulated their feelings:

*“People hate me for nothing, when I ask them why do you hate me they do not answer” (Lerato.1.13).*

*“Sometimes they ask me – how do you feel? Many, many times they ask – how do you feel? After that they go to a corner and laugh” (Lindiwe.1.32).*

*“I do not like people giving me things, I want my sister to go to the shop and buy for me what I need because when their children see me wearing the clothes they say – my mother gave her my clothes” (Mpumi.2.9 & 10).*

Although these views of the orphaned learners suggest heightened sensitivity, the narrations of the orphans also allude to other people's **lack of sensitivity** in their behaviour towards orphans.

### 3.3.1 Sub-theme: Relationship with relatives

This sub-theme describes the experiences of the orphaned learners with the relatives who play the role of caregivers and those who provide assistance for the caregivers. Orphaned learners' experiences and opinions of their relationship with their relatives were **diverse, although mostly negative**. There were cases where the orphaned learner recounted being mistreated by relatives and not being given the support they needed. For one learner being ill treated by a relative was in the form of being denied time to play like other children and receiving endless chores. She felt that her grandmother did not understand her needs. Another learner's experience of ill treatment was being falsely accused of breaking a television set and subsequently being beaten for it. In yet another case a learner had to live with his sister because the grandmother drank alcohol and came home late, interfering with his homework. These learners expressed their opinions about their relatives as follows:

*"That one, she (stepmother) hates me and that is why I do not go there because I used to think that she can kill me" (Tebogo.1.28).*

*"She (grandmother) treats me like a dog" (Lesego.1.18).*

*"One day my cousin broke the television then my aunt said it was me then her husband beat me" (Lindiwe.1.42).*

*"My grandmother when she gives me money, my uncle says – you play with money" (Lindiwe.1.54).*

It is likely that some of the orphans were not receiving what they expected from their relatives.

Some of the experiences of the orphaned learners give the impression that orphans are concerned about fair treatment, and value quality time with their friends and education. The learners narrated:

*“They treat us like others. They help all of us like a teacher” (Lindiwe.1.47 & 1.48).*

*“Teachers are doing great. They teach us and respect us” (Tebogo1.1.34 & 1.1.35).*

*“These are my friends. I go with them to school. When I finish school I want to do BCom (Bachelor of Commerce)” (Tebogo.1.1 & 1.2).*

*“These are my teachers. I like my teachers because they teach me what I do not know (Lesogo.1.3).*

*“I like my school because it is where I get my education. My teachers are good, but there is my friend who is naughty when the teacher tells him something he does not listen. When the teacher writes something on the blackboard he just plays” (Thato.3.1.15 & 6).*

Not all learners experienced neglect and ill treatment from relatives. There were some narrations of experiences of **supportive relatives and friends**. There were instances where relatives and friends intervened and assisted orphans in providing for their needs. One learner reported how her sister’s friends interceded when they did not have food and clothes and gave them food parcels and clothes. The learners voiced the following experiences:

*“They asked her what was her problem. She told them the story then they went to the hospital and told the doctor who then gave my sister food parcel. My aunt she takes clothes of white people from the kitchens and give it to me ”(Mpumi.1.10 & 11).*

*“My aunt sometimes she gives me R250 to buy food and sometimes she buys for me clothes” (Lindiwe.1.4).*

*“When I have problems I tell my aunt” (Nomsa.1.10).*

*“I was given this uniform by my aunt and uncle” (Lesego.1.17).*

Previous studies (Foord, Jallow, Paine & Sarr, 2004; Horizon Project, 2005) also report **multiple realities of experiences** of the children in their studies with regard to support from **extended families**. Some of the orphans in the studies were helped by extended

families while others received no support or were ill treated by their extended family members. In my study, although most of the learners reported that some of their relatives provided for their material needs, there were a few incidences of relatives supporting the learners emotionally. One learner wrote the following:

#### **About my home**

*I am proud of my grandmother because she tries to do everything for me but she cannot afford to buy me things. I wish that my grandmother could have many things. I love her and she loves me. We are staying in a small room, and I am fine with that. I will buy a big thing for my grandmother. I treat her like my mother. Sometimes I think that she is my mother. I do not care what people say about me. I will finish school and thank my grandmother. I wish God would bless my family. (Lindiwe)*

This description of the loving and caring relationship the orphaned learner experienced with her grandmother suggests that fulfilment of her emotional needs was paramount, compared to her deprived material needs. The quotations from other orphaned learners appear to suggest that some orphaned learners may react positively towards relatives who provide for their material needs and appreciated those who love and care for them. Generally, as mentioned earlier, there was a notable lack of evidence of relatives supporting the emotional needs of the orphaned learners. Foster (1995), in an earlier study, reports that there were complaints of orphans being ill treated by relatives and the examples given were exploitation or being beaten. The orphans reported that they were neglected, had health problems, lacked food and school fees (Foster, 1995). According to Foster (1995) one of the reasons likely to be the cause of discrimination could be economic deprivation forcing the caregiver to provide for their own biological children first before providing for orphans.

#### **3.3.2 Sub-theme: Relationship with educators**

The orphaned learners interviewed generally experienced a **positive relationship with their educators**. Their comments suggested that the relationship they had with their educators was not discriminative but supportive and respectful. The learners talked about

how their educators treated them like other learners and respected them. The quotations below present how the learners viewed their educators:

*“They treat us like others and help us as a educator” (Lindiwe.1.48).*

*“They are doing great, they teach and respect us” (Tebogo.1.34).*

*“Educators are ok”(Lerato.1.62).*

*“My educators are alright” (Karabo.1.10).*

*“These are my educators. I like my educators because they teach me what I do not know” (Lesego.1.3.).*

Pomeroy (1999), in her study on excluded students’ perception of their school experiences, also reported on the different experiences of the relationship between students and educators. Some of the students in the study described their relationship as positive while others were neutral or even antagonistic (Pomeroy, 1999). In this study it seems that the orphaned learners expected their educators to treat them like other learners. The expectation and the desire to be treated like others might possibly mean that the orphaned learners do not want to be discriminated against and stigmatised; but at the same time the comments suggest that the learners might feel reluctant to take handouts from educators.

### **3.3.3 Sub-theme: Relationship with siblings**

Some of the orphaned learners interviewed experienced a harmonious, loving and **caring relationship with their siblings**. They talked about supporting or planning to provide for their younger brothers and sisters. The kind of support that the orphaned learners talked about was paying tuition fees for younger siblings and providing food and clothing. The siblings supported each other in doing household chores, doing homework, socialising and sharing food.

*“We stay nice, we do not bother each other. We stay like brothers I respect him and he respect me. We do not fight with my sister like others. We help each other” (Tshepo.1.44).*

*“If I get money I want to help my younger brother to complete his studies” (Tebogo.1.5).*

*“I like my brother because he gives me everything” (Lesego.1.1).*

Other learners had different experiences. The learners recounted the **hostile relationships** they were experiencing with their siblings. The learners said:

*“My brother is always shouting at me and my sister hits me too much (Lindiwe.1.25). She does not love me” (Lindiwe.1.72).*

*“My brother beats me up and my sister she is very selfish, she does not want to give me anything when I ask her” (Lebo.1.13).*

From the different experiences, one cannot generalise how the orphaned learners related to other people. Every situation was different and the possibility exists that contextual factors could influence their relationships. Hostile relationships between siblings could be a result of lashing out in frustration borne out of lack of other channels to deal with emotions or possibly a lack of adult supervision and guidance.

### **3.3.4 Sub-theme: Child-headed families.**

There were two orphaned learners who were living on their own, the eldest sibling assuming the role of the parent. The narratives in these families differed. The first child-headed family consisted of two brothers and one sister. The narrations of the orphaned learner suggested that the siblings got along well, doing chores together and supporting each other emotionally. The main problem was that there were days when they did not have food to eat. In the second child-headed family, two sisters lived by themselves. One of the orphaned learners from a child-headed family mentioned that they lacked medical care, food provision, adult supervision and care. She was traumatised by the fact that her sister was having sexual relationship with boys with nobody to intervene. She felt that her

privacy was violated and she did not have an adult mentor to talk to about the problem. She felt alone and vulnerable and described the situation as follows:

*“I do not like boys. My sister do snack things with boys. They come and kiss in this room. They do not go to the bathroom or say – “Mpumi go out”. There is nobody who can help me. When my older sister tried to tell her not to do it they fought” (Mpumi.2.23, 24 & 25).*

It is clear from the above situation that the two sisters could be in need of adult supervision and monitoring. The fact that they are fending for themselves in the absence of the care and supervision of an adult is likely to expose them to risky sexual behaviour. Adato et al., (2005) report similar findings in their study. Informants interviewed narrated that some of the older orphans in child-headed households bring boyfriends to their homes due to the absence of parental figures providing guidance and supervision. It seems from this study that the orphaned learners were more at ease when they had a loving and caring relationship with their siblings than when the siblings were always fighting. The learners who often quarrelled and fought with their siblings appeared to be anxious and emotionally stressed. The shouting and fighting may be an emotional outlet or a way of coping with unfulfilled emotional needs.

### **3.3.5 Sub-theme: Relationship with peers**

The orphaned learners had **contrasting experiences** regarding their relationship with their peers. Half of the orphaned learners interviewed had a **positive and supportive relationship** with their peers and described their relationship with their peers as loving and caring. They narrated how they shared food with their peers and acknowledged being accepted by their peers. The learners expressed their positive experiences as follows:

*“Here at school I have three friends, we walk with them to school and they visit me at home” (Tshepo.1.57).*

*“My friends, when they come back from the trips they tell me about the trip and I wish that I went with them” (Tebogo.1.40).*



*“I have good friends, they come with break and they call me to come and eat with them” (Karabo.1.8).*

*“I have good friends, we play together” (Nomsa.1.9).*

*“I have good friends, they do not tell me – you, your mother passed back off. They help me with my homework” (Lesego.1.6).*

*“They do not treat me like I do not have a father and a mother” (Tshepo.1.54).*

The other half experienced being rejected and discriminated against by their peers. The explanation as to why this happened varied. There were learners who believed they were being singled out because they did not have money and could not afford to pay for school trips or buy snacks during break time. Others explained that they were being rejected because they were stigmatised as orphans. One learner talked about her friend being rejected by her peers because she was HIV positive; yet another orphaned learner narrated that her peers were rejecting her because she is epileptic. In other cases the orphans narrated that their peers responded to them in a hostile and verbally intimidating way. Although the orphaned learners gave different reasons for their peers rejecting and discriminating against them, they all felt socially isolated from others. The following quotations indicate the views of the learners:

*“... When you stand up when you are an orphan, they have a topic about you. They arrow you. My friend is HIV. She is not happy because other people they laugh at her. When she comes, they run away” (Lindiwe.1.17 & 36).*

*“Where I lived, my friends told me – do not be my friend again because your mother passed away” (Lesego.1.7).*

*“Children at home and in school say that, I am going to infect them with epilepsy. When we are working in a group, they do not want me to touch their things and they do not want to touch me. If I touch their things they want to fight me” (Mpumi.2.4, 5 & 6).*

The themes that emerged from the relationship between orphaned learners and their peers give the impression that the orphaned learners were concerned about their need for acceptance, support, sharing and socialising. Foord et al. (2004) reports that sometimes peers mock and laugh at orphans them because they do not have nice dresses to wear on

festive days. In the current study the orphaned learners experiencing rejection by their peers felt stigmatised and discriminated against by people with whom they longed to associate. Veal et al. (2001) report that orphans identified school as a place where they could make friends, socialise and play with other children. On the whole, it seems that half of the orphans in the current study had negative experiences of school, whereas the others had positive peer experiences at school.

### **3.3.6 Sub-theme: Orphaned learners' relationship with other orphans**

Some of the orphaned learners interviewed were able to identify other orphans and socialise with them. Haggard (2005) points out that bereaved children tend to find support from being in the company of other children who have experienced loss. The learners shared feelings of sympathy and empathy with other orphans and they were **willing to help and care for them**. It is likely that some of the orphaned learners were aware of how other orphans are being ostracised, stigmatised and discriminated against by their peers. The following extracts express the feelings of orphaned learners towards other orphans:

*“There are some children whose parents died of HIV, I wish that I could know others so that I help them” (Lindiwe.1.27).*

*“It is not good not to have parents because those who do not have parents, when they go to their relatives, their cousins says – ish”(Lerato.1.75).*

*“I want to be a social worker so that I can help other orphans have grants and good education” (Nomsa.1.2).*

*“I play with other orphans” (Lesego.1.21).*

## **3.4 THEME 3: CONCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY AS ORPHANS**

This theme illustrates how the orphaned learners see themselves. The theme also describes some of their hopes and aspirations in terms of what they want to become in future. During the *draw and write* sessions some of the learners revealed what they liked

doing, such as playing with friends and associating with other orphans. The orphaned learners mentioned things they disliked; for instance, being deprived of money to buy snacks during break time, being mistreated by relatives and talking about their parents. The orphaned learners described their characters and talked about their future careers and ambitions. The careers included being a social worker, a nurse, a doctor, a policewoman, a soldier and a pilot.

### 3.4.1 Sub-theme: Self-image

The sub-theme self-image describes how the orphaned learners see and feel about themselves. The majority of the orphaned learners in this study had a positive self-image. It is evident from the following excerpt that some of the learners seemed to have accepted their *orphaned* situation and talked about moving on with life.

*“If I stress myself that my mother passed away, I will not be able to move on. I just want to forget about it because life goes on” (Tshepo.1.29).*

One of the learners talked on behalf of her friend who was HIV positive and expressed her opinion about people who stigmatise and discriminate against this friend. Another learner expressed that she felt beautiful despite what others say or how they treated her. The learners said the following about themselves:

*“I am a person who cares about people with HIV” (Lindiwe.1.11).*

*“This is I. I like myself. I do not say, why did God made me like this” (Lesego.1.5).*

In a *draw and write* session one of the orphaned learners described herself as follows:

*I am a person who likes other people. I do not like people who hate me for nothing. I am always happy and not selfish. I do not tell people that they are careless. I wish to finish school and help my grandmother because if it were not for my grandmother where would I be now? I loved my parents so much when they died I cried a lot (Lerato).*

One orphaned learner saw herself as being different from others and wanted to be like them. The learner is epileptic and has frequent epileptic incidents. The learner narrated that her peers reject her because of her health condition. She feels that it is not fair that she is sick and perceives herself as not being beautiful. It seems that she sees herself the way other people see and treat her. The following quote reflects the perception of this learner:

*“I see the other learners they are beautiful. I do not like myself. I do not want to be sick everyday. I have epilepsy and it is not right for me. I want to be beautiful” (Mpumi.1.16 & 29).*

#### **3.4.2 Sub-theme: Wanting to be/career aspirations and future expectations**

Most of the orphans I interviewed in School A had a career in mind or knew what they wanted to become in future. The careers that the learners talked about were those that involved helping other people, such as a social worker, a bank manager, a policewoman, a nurse and a pilot. The reason for choosing the careers was likely to be twofold. The orphaned learners seemed to aspire to help other people, orphans in particular. The other possible reason for the careers the orphans chose was to fulfil the needs that were not currently being fulfilled. For example, one learner wanted to be a pilot so that she could go to different places because she could not afford to pay for school excursions and longed to go to the places her peers visited. Another learner explained that she wanted to be a bank manager, so that she could have money to build a big house for her granny because they were living in a small house. Mpumi wanted to be a nurse because she believed that her mother died as a result of negligence when she was admitted to hospital. Mpumi’s other reason for interest in a nursing career is that she is epileptic and needs proper medical attention, which she believes that she is not getting from the clinic. Yet another orphaned learner wanted to be a soldier, to fight for people in vulnerable situations. This career choice seemed motivated by the violent death of his father.

*“I want to be a social worker so that I can help other orphans have grants and good education” (Nomsa.1.2).*

*“In my dreams, I want to be a social worker to help those who are affected” (Lerato.1.66).*

*“When I finish school, I want to be a nurse to help sick people” (Mpumi.1.2).  
“In my dream I want to be a doctor. The reason why I want to be a doctor is to help people who are suffering from different illness” (Tshepo.1.19.).*

*“I want to be a pilot so that I can go to many places because now when the school has a trip I do not have money” (Lindiwe.1.21).*

*“I want to be a bank manager” (Thandi.1.8).  
“I want to be a soldier, to help people like if there are some people troubling others. I fight with them” (Lebo.1.11 & 12).*

In their research, Sengendo and Nambi (1997) found that non-orphans were more optimistic about the future when compared to orphans. A similar finding was reported in the study of orphans and vulnerable children in a psychological survey cited in the SCOPE-OVC/Zambia (2003), where the authors found that half of their respondents did not feel hopeful about the future. A similar finding was reported in a study done by Walker (2002) on child-headed households. Children living by themselves were less optimistic about their future than those living with parents or guardians.

Regarding the future of the orphans, Foord and others (2004) found that education featured strongly when the orphans talked about the future. Some orphans were optimistic about the future; they talked about improving their present life by completing their education and getting jobs. Others were pessimistic because they were uncertain of completing their schooling. Although this study does not include the views of the non-orphans, the orphaned learners interviewed appeared to be very positive about their future: they dream of being in professions where they can help other people, particularly other orphans.

### **3.5 THEME 4: FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL NEEDS**

The orphaned learners experienced the need for financial support in different ways. The prominent themes that emerged from the interviews were the need to provide for their

physical needs, such as nutrition, clothing, school requirements, housing and medical care. One learner wrote the following paragraph as *bad things* in her life:

***My Bad Things***

*One day I come back home and there is nothing to eat. Another day I do not have shoes to go to school. At school, if you do not have shoes they tell you to go back home. At home they tell me there is no money to buy shoes. I do not like to tell people about my parents because if I talk about my parents I feel bad and I want to cry. I want a beautiful house and good food to eat every morning and at night because I do not eat anything in the morning before going to school. When I finish school, I want to go to Technical College. After college I want to be somebody and buy furniture and give my uncle money and say thank you for everything you did for me. (Thandi)*

The above paragraph indicates the orphaned learner's various financial needs. She calls these needs *bad things* because they are the things she needs yet is deprived of due to lack of money. On the other hand, she appreciates the assistance that she is getting from her relatives and hopes to give them a token of her appreciation in future.

**3.5.1 Sub-theme: Nutritional needs**

In this sub-theme I identified three different kinds of experience regarding the nutritional needs of the orphaned learners. The first group of orphans talked about having no food to eat at home and no support from relatives. These learners came to school without breakfast, missed lunch and sometimes the evening meal as well. Three learners shared the experience of feeling frustrated, helpless and left out during break time because they do not have money to buy snacks or bring food from home to eat during break time. One learner reported that his friends do share what they have for break time with him while another learner said that her uncle gives her money for break.

The second group of orphans are those living with relatives who struggled to provide for their food and occasionally received support from other relatives in terms of financial assistance. The third group of orphans relied on the Government Feeding Scheme<sup>13</sup> and

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<sup>13</sup> The Primary School Feeding Scheme was introduced in 1994. The aim of the feeding programme was to contribute to the improvement of educational quality by enhancing learning capacity, school

food parcels from other organisations. One learner described how a group of friends talked with her sister then arranged to get them food parcels from a soup kitchen programme. The assistance the learners received varied according to the school. In School A the orphaned learners were given bread on Mondays and Wednesdays. The bread is a donation from a feeding scheme sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church. In School B the learners were given lunch as part of the Government Feeding Scheme, which provides the school with food throughout the year. Some of the orphaned learners expressed their experiences as follows:

*“I am suffering because sometimes there is no food at home. When we come to school we do not have anything to eat. When it is lunchtime your heart grows bigger you say – what am I going to eat at home. When there is no food I pack my prep book, drink water, relax for fifteen minutes then go back to school. Sometimes my friends here in school have money like R1-00 during break. I just go to the toilet, come back sit in the class and watch them eating” (Tshepo.1.11, 49 &50).*

*“In school they sometime give bread to the people who do not have food” (Lerato.1.92).  
“There are some people who come and give us food like a packet of beans and a packet of flour” (Mpumi.1.17).*

*“I have good friends, they come with break and they call me to come and eat with them” (Karabo.1.8).*

*“My uncle and my aunt buy me clothes and give me money for break” (Nomsa.1.8).*

Some of the learners appeared to be more deprived in terms of their nutritional requirements than others. In School A the learners were given bread occasionally; some of them talked about being without food the whole day. In School B, on the other hand, the learners missed breakfast and, sometimes, evening meals, but they did eat lunch at school. This result is in agreement with the study of Giese et al. (2003) that reported children staying away from school because of hunger. Makame et al. (2002) and Foord et al. (2004), in their comparative studies of orphans and non-orphans, reveal that more orphans than non-orphans lack food at home. Similarly, more orphans mentioned being

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attendance and punctuality among primary school learners and to contribute to general health development by alleviating short-term hunger (RDP White Paper, 1994).

hungry at school (Foster, 1997; Chatterji, Dougherty, Ventimiglia, Mulenga, Mukaneza, Murray et al., 2005).

### **3.5.2 Sub-theme: School requirements**

Some of the orphaned learners receive a child support grant and use part of it to pay for school fees. The child support grant was introduced into South Africa in 1998 following recommendations of the Lund Committee for Child and Family Support (Case, Hosegood & Lund, 2003). The grant is a monthly amount paid to the mother, father or primary caregiver of children between the ages 7 and 14 in poor households (Department of Social Development, 2003). The child support grant for 2007 is R200 per month (Department of Social Development). The caregivers who qualify should be individuals earning not more than R1100 per month in rural areas and caregivers in urban areas living in a flat or house earning less than R800 a month. The purpose of the grant is to assist children living in poverty (Hall & Monson, 2006).

Other learners reported that relatives pay their school fees and buy their uniforms. There were other financial requirements that were not covered by money received from grants or relatives. Two learners reported feeling left out and discriminated against because they were unable to pay for school field trips. The participating learners voiced their opinion about their deprived needs as follows:

*“Maybe, lets say, you are to go to Joburg with the school and they pay before and they talk about you (mimicking) – you don’t pay, you don’t pay. They say umm shame where will she get the money” (Lindiwe.1.40 & 42).*

*“I do not go for trips, I just stay at home” (Tebogo.1.38).*

*“When my friends come back from the trip, they tell me about the trip and I wish I went with them” (Tebogo.1.40).*



### **3.5.3 Sub-theme: Housing needs**

Some learners expressed their opinion about where they lived. The issues mentioned were that their houses were small, temporary structures far away from school. One of the orphaned learners regarded her home as not being beautiful and longed to build a bigger house in the future. Some of the orphaned learners had to wake up early in the morning and walk long distances to school. One learner who was living with her uncle and aunt talked positively about her home and appreciated it. She described her home as follows:

*“I like my home because it is clean. I like my home because if I did not have my home where would I stay” (Lesego.1.4).*

### **3.5.4 Sub-theme: Medical care**

One of the learners is epileptic and experiences frequent epileptic incidents. She receives medication from a clinic through the assistance of her sister’s friend. The learner wants to go to the hospital because she believes that she can get better medicine from the hospital. In her own words she explained:

*“This medicine I do not want to drink it because it makes me fat and does not help me. It stops and come back again. Now I want to go to the hospital but I do not have money to go to the hospital” (Mpumi.1. 20 & 22).*

Another learner said that she often has flu and stomach problems. Her mother used to take her to the hospital but since her mother passed away there is no one to take her there. She believes that she is always sick because she does not have enough clothes to wear to keep her warm.

This theme covers the material and financial well being of the orphaned learners. From the interviews it seems that the level of material and financial deprivation varies. Some of the orphaned learners seem to be more deprived than others. On the whole orphans seem

to be receiving some sort of material assistance yet seem in need of emotional and social support.

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

In Chapter 3 I presented the empirical data from the interviews I had with the orphaned learners. The diverse findings of the experiences of the orphaned learners demonstrate the multiple realities of orphanhood and its consequences. The learners revealed emotional longing for their parents' absence, as well as coping strategies. It was also evident that some of the orphans were still grieving and traumatised by the death of their parents, yet it appears that emotional support for such orphans is lacking. Some of the orphans narrated positive experiences with their relatives and peers while others experienced discrimination and stigma. Relationships with educators were generally positive. The learners expected the educators to treat them like other learners and with respect.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the themes that emerged from the findings of the interviews conducted with the educators from both the schools that participated in this research study.