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The Experience and Meaning of Family in Youth-Headed Households from Gauteng, Katlehong Township

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Abstract

South Africa is considered to be a developing country and as the country evolves, various societal issues become evident, posing various challenges to communities in the country. Therefore, as the country tries to deal with these societal issues, communities and its people are forced to make changes as they try to adapt to the shifting norms. The family system and its structures seem to highlight some of the changes, with child and youth-headed households becoming more prevalent and a norm in South African communities. This research study is aimed at exploring how individuals heading youth-headed households experience their roles and responsibilities as heads, and the challenges they have experienced in maintaining their family units. Furthermore, this study aims to understand what the concept of family means to these young people, as their family system is different to the norm and what support they have received while heading their families. A qualitative research approach, specifically phenomenological research design was used in this study. Five participants (3 females and 2 males) aged between 19-35 years, from Katlehong, a township in Gauteng were purposively selected and requested to participate in the study. Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews and data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Six main themes emerged from the findings of the study, with findings suggesting that participants became the heads of their household/families following the death of parents/caregivers and feeling abandoned by some of their extended family members. Participants reflected on some of the responsibilities they have and the sacrifices they have made in order to sustain their households. Findings further highlighted the state of poverty that exists in these households and the lack of efficient support from the governmental social systems, with participants having to rely on the support and assistance of community members or an NGO.

Key words: Youth-headed, family, loss, resilience, support

Declaration

I Sibongile Petronella Molemane, solemnly declare that this research report entitled “, is my own work and no plagiarism as all literature sources used or quoted have been refenced. This research report is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Clinical Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand and has not been submitted or published before.

Signed on 30th day of June 2021



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

South Africa is a growing and fast developing country, however, during its development there has also been an increase in various societal issues, such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, socio-economic improbability and poverty; which have impacted the country negatively (Byenkya et al., 2008). The prevalence of these societal issues has been linked to children being orphaned due to either the mortality of parents and/or family members, caused mainly by the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic and/or migrating patterns where parents are forced to look for employment in other provinces/countries (Mturi, 2012). This has therefore, resulted in children being orphaned and the emergence of child and youth headed households, which are now becoming a norm and reality in South Africa (Molemane, 2013).

According to an analysis conducted by Hall (2019) from the children's institute, using the Statistics South Africa (2019) General Household Survey of 2018, "there were 2.7 million orphans in South Africa, including children without a living mother, father or both parents, and is equivalent to 14% of all children in South Africa" (p. 218). Additionally, orphan rates seem particularly high in provinces that had former homelands. Furthermore, Hall (2019) reports that the total number of orphans increased by more than 1million between the years 2002 and 2009, and by the year 2017 the number had dropped due to improved access to antiretrovirals. According to Hall's (2019) report, "there were approximately 55,000 children living in a total of 33, 000 child-only households across South Africa, equating 0.3% of all children" (p. 219). According to the Youth Development Institute of South Africa for the National Youth Development Agency Report (2018), in 2016 South Africa had approximately 19.8% of households headed by youths between ages 15 to 24 years. Hall (2019) highlights however, that the statistics reported on child-headed households in South Africa should be interpreted with caution as these households form a very small sub-sample of the General Household Survey and there has been limited robust research data on child-headed households in South Africa. Therefore, even though these statistics may not necessarily be very high; they are highlighting the consistent presence of these kinds of households.

Van Dijk and Van Driel (2009) further highlight that the rise of these societal matters has caused radical changes in society, resulting in an altered community lifestyle where communities and its members have a lack of resources and skills to improve the effects of these problems. They further assert that the emergence of child and youth-headed households could be viewed as a new coping mechanism, resulting from the collapse of previous community structures and family life (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2009). We can therefore, view child and youth-headed households as introducing a new form of family structure that has emerged from changes occurring in community (Molemane, 2013); however, remaining cognisant that these new family structures may present distinctive complexities that may further challenge and place burden on the current societal structures (Human & Van Rensburg, 2011).

1.2. Definition of Concepts

Various definitions have been shared by different authors regarding child-headed households. According to Human and Van Rensburg (2011), a child-headed household is a household existing without any parents or adults to take care of the home, thus, leading to the eldest of the children undertaking the role and responsibility of caring for his/her younger siblings.

Maqoko and Dreyer (2007) share similar notions, however, they further add that not all child-headed household are without adults but that some of these households may have an older person residing in home with the children and are ill, for example, grandparents or a parent infected with AIDS; therefore, are unable to take care of themselves and/or the children. In this case, the children are required to care for both elderly and/or ill parent as well as their siblings.

Other authors like Mturi (2012) believe that it is important to indicate the age of the children residing in child-headed households and further defines them as consisting of children who are in the care of another child and they are all under the age of 18.

The formation of child-headed households has also brought light to youth-headed households, where individuals may have started heading their household as children and continued to do so until they reached young adulthood, which is the case for some of the participants in this study. Therefore, for this research study, we must consider the definition of youth-headed households, but first will clarify what is defined as youth in South Africa. According to the National Youth Policy for 2020-2030, youth is defined as young people between

the ages 14 and 35 years old, which reported to be consistent with the African Youth Charter and Statistics South Africa. There has not been a clear definition of youth-headed household or family in literature or South African government policies of papers, however, Ndaleni (2012) who conducted a similar study to this one, defined youth-headed household as being a household where an individual who is between the ages of 18-25 years takes the responsibility of looking after the households and his/her siblings. For this research study, using the definition of youth in South Africa, youth-headed household refers to individuals between the ages of 15 – 35, who are the heads of their households and taking responsibility to care for their siblings (either younger or older), and working together with their siblings to maintain their family unit and households. The term 'youth-headed' will be used for this research study, however, the term 'child-headed' will also be used particularly for the literature review section as this is the term used in the literature used.

1.3. Rationale

This section will highlight the rationale and motivation for the chosen research study, supported by various literature. According to Muyomi (2012),

> child-headed households are providing a new model of a nuclear family that contradicts traditional African child rearing practices where children are fitted in an extended family setting and taken care of by an adult in the event that they have lost their parents (p.194).

In the past, in most black South African communities, extended family members would assume responsibility for orphaned children regardless of whether they had sufficient resources as the motivation was to ensure that family members stay together and are taken care of (Foster, 2000). Over the years however, with the growth of child and youth-headed households, there seems to be some difficulty experienced by kinship networks in providing support to children who have been orphaned, resulting in the expansion of child and youth-headed households (Meintjes et al., 2010). Therefore, children who do not have regular contact with their extended families are at risk of being abandoned due to the perceived burden, thus resulting in them being left to grow up in child-only households and taking care of themselves (Foster 2000; Francis-Chizororo 2010).

Phillips (2011) indicates that in most cases, children or young people who have been orphaned would rather not be separated but opt to remain together even without guaranteed support or resources. In some cases, a promise was made to their late parents that they would take care of one another and their household. This may perhaps highlight the connection between siblings who have been orphaned and continue to live together, showing some form of union in finding ways to maintain their family units despite some of the challenges they may continue to experience. The concept of a child-only family may be contradicting the expected 'family' norm, where a family includes adults as parents, authoritative figures and care givers; and the children as helpless individuals needing their parents support to survive the world (Mturi, 2012). Therefore, as Mturi (2012) proclaims, child and youth -headed households seem to challenge the existing norms and ideas of what a family should look like and introduces a new norm where young people are heading households and assuming adult responsibilities and even expected to relinquish child-like behaviours, like hanging out with friend or being able to attend school.

In these households, usually the eldest sibling is faced with the duty of taking care of his/her younger siblings, assisting them with school work and providing not only emotional support but also financial support in order to ensure that the household is maintained and that the younger children grow up in a stable home (Human & Van Rensburg, 2011). It is difficult to comprehend how these young people are able to survive daily, therefore, this research is looking to learn and understand how the heads of the youth-headed households are able to take on these responsibilities and maintain a household without the direct aid of adults. Furthermore, this research study also wants to try and understand some of the difficulties, if any, that the heads of the households' experience in playing the role of a 'parent' to their siblings, while still having to maintain a 'sibling' relationship with them. There has been some research conducted in Africa, including South Africa on the topic of child-headed households, which was conducted mainly between the years 2007 and 2011 (i.e., Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007; Van Dijk, 2008; Van Dijk and Van Driel, 2009; Human & Van Rensburg, 2011; Phillips, 2011). however, most articles were published in the year 2012 (i.e. Kakuru & Kendrick, 2012; Payne, 2012; Mturi, 2012; Muyomi, 2012). It is important to take note however, that even though there has been research on the topic (i.e., Ndaleni, 2012; Mukashema, 2014; Ntuli, Sebola & Madiba, 2020), there has been

limited published research on the youth-headed households specifically, suggesting that there is a gap in this field.

Furthermore, most research that has been conducted on this topic has focused mainly on how HIV/AIDS has contributed to the formation of these households, and other research has focused mainly on the younger children in these households and how their academic and psychological development may be impacted. Therefore, the findings from this study may continue bringing focus and contribute new knowledge to the phenomenon of youth-headed households, as it brings more focus to the specific experiences related to maintaining this different family structure as young people without parents or adults

1.4. Research Aim

The aim of this research study was to explore how individuals living and heading youth-headed households experience their roles and responsibilities and how they construct their family units, as they take care of their siblings without the presence of an parents/adults in the family. Furthermore, the research study also aims to understand what challenges they encountered while taking on this responsibility. This research study also aims to highlight a different perspective in relation to research on child and youth-headed households, by exploring how these individuals understand the role or define family, as their families and household differs to the norm. Furthermore, it aims to understand the relationship and role their extended families, communities and government systems have played in helping them adjust or sustain their households following the death or absence of their parents and/or grandparents, as this may also highlight the role that various systems in play in both the individual's and their family's life.

1.5. Research Questions

The research study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do young people in youth-headed households experience being the head of their households and having to care for their siblings?
- How do these young people understand and maintain their youth-headed family units and what challenges and support have they encountered while taking on this responsibility?
- How has their experience of heading a household impacted them?

1.6. Structure of the Report

This research report has been structured into of five chapters. The first chapter is the introductory chapter (present chapter) which introduces and outlines the context of the study. In this chapter the concepts used in the study were defined and the rationale of the study, research aims and research questions were explained, aligned with the focus of the research study. Chapter two of the study will be focusing on the reviewing available literature on child and youth-headed households, while also incorporating other literature relevant to the study.

This chapter will also be discussing Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the theoretical framework used in this research study. Chapter three will be exploring the research methodology used in the research study, discussing the research design, data collection procedure and method of analysis used. This chapter will also be discussing the ethical considerations and procedures used in the study and the researcher reflections on the process of conducting the study. Chapter four will be focused on discussing the research study's results and findings following the collection of data and exploring the various theme and subthemes that emerged. Chapter five is the last chapter of the researcher paper, where the findings will be summarised; and the limitations and recommendations from the research study will be discussed and the paper concluded.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will explore some of the literature that is available on both child and youth-headed households in South Africa, while also incorporating literature from other African countries.

2.1. The Phenomenon of Child and Youth-Headed Households

Child-headed households seem to be a predominant phenomenon in Africa; therefore, a fair amount of research studies have been conducted focusing on this topic. In relation to South Africa however, there seems to be some progression on research focusing on the topic over the years, such as the work of Mturi (2012), who focused on understanding "what is known and Unknown" regarding child-headed households in South Africa; Ndaleni (2012) who looked at the experiences of the youth heading up these households and the challenges they encounter; and Dlungwana and Sathiparsad (2008) who conducted research on the experience of children who are heads of households in Hammersdale, Kwazulu-Natal.

Makiwane (2004) indicated that the high percentage of children who have been orphaned in Africa is usually seen in countries with high prevalence levels of HIV/AIDS. Majority of the research studies that have been conducted focused predominately on the role that HIV/AIDS played in the emergence of child-headed households, thus being the main cause especially in Africa and South Africa as a country. This is highlighted in the work of Mturi (2012) who suggests that the HIV/AIDS epidemic contributed to the rise of child-headed households in South Africa; and research by Madhavan and Schatz (2007) stating that there was growing literature on the issue of HIV/AIDS and the repercussions it had on the various households. Meintjes et al. (2010) also conducted research on the nature and circumstances experienced by children who were orphaned by the AIDS epidemic leading to them living in child-headed households, indicating the impact that the virus had on the emergence of these households. Ayieko (2007) further elaborates that many countries have experienced socioeconomic penalties due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and more children have fallen victim to orphan-hood because of the infectious virus, leading to the mortality of their parents and family members, which may be seen predominantly in rural areas. Freeman et al. (2009) highlight that most research studies have placed focus on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in relation to child-headed households, however, minimal attention and research has been given to the psychosocial experiences of the children in these households.

While the HIV and AIDS epidemic have been identified as the leading cause for child-headed families, other studies have also highlighted that in most African countries, children are often left impoverished and vulnerable due to other reasons such as war in their countries, parents or family members being migrant workers, abandonment, separation and death due to natural causes, which have also contributed to the phenomenon of child-headed households and families (Nkomo, 2006; Maqoko, 2006; Meintjies et al, 2010; Mothapo, 2016). According to Madhavan (2008), children were often orphaned and isolated from their communities due to the civil war. Furthermore, Bowen (2006) also highlights that in countries stricken by war, children would be forced to join either rebel groups or the military in order to receive protection and ensure they survive.

Migration patterns in South Africa can also be identified as one of the major contributing factors to the development of youth-headed households, especially during the Apartheid era where there was restriction for Africans regarding where they could stay with their families and were often separated (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2009). Furthermore, due to migration patterns, parents would often leave their homes moving to other provinces or countries either in search of employment or due to being exiled; thus, leaving their children in the care of other family members or on their own with the eldest child being given the responsibility to care for the siblings and household (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2009). Madhavan and Schatz (2007) have also noted that in some instances, parents are able to send remittances back home to their families, therefore, helping those households maintain some economic base, unlike households where parents have passed away and can no longer assist. It is imperative however, to highlight that children need more than an ‘economic’ base, but also need the care, support and love which contributes to a sense of belonging and safety (Mturi, 2012). Grusec (2011) in agreement with

Mturi (2012) further asserts that:

> there is strong evidence that family structures are not a determinant of successful parenting but rather it is the resources, social support, quality of parent-child interactions and relationships, and the family emotional climate and stability that are prerequisites for a successful family functioning (p. 245).

Child-headed families have not only become a reality but seem to be a permanent feature in societies and this occurrence seems to be in contrast with previous African societal norms that expected the extended family members to take responsibility and care for orphaned children, especially following parental death (Kurebwa, 2014; Kurebwa, 2014; Van Der Mark, 2015; Mturi, 2012). Bequele (2007) highlights the African proverb stating that "it takes a village to raise a child" (p.11) which indicates that the community is often involved in assisting parents to raise their children. However, due to increased levels of unemployment and poverty, it has become difficult for extended families to care for orphaned children (Mturi, 2012; Ndaleni, 2012). In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, Moime (2007) also highlighted that in most cases, children were often left in the care of their close relatives or extended family members. However, these family members could not care or take responsibility for these children due to economic difficulties, thus leading to these children living on their own and contributing to the increase of these households. Similar studies have observed that the rapid growth of children being orphaned has over-stretched the resources or capacity for extended families, therefore, weakening the role of family and kinship system in South African communities, as they can no longer take in these children and efficiently care for them (Dlungwana & Sathiparsad, 2008; Mturi & Nzimande, 2006; Walker et al., 2004).

With the decline in traditional family systems that would absorb orphaned or abandoned children, one would look to the foster care system in South Africa to take these children in and care for them. However, there have been cases where the children have chosen to stay together with their siblings, caring for each other and trying to keep their family homes/property, rather than being separated and taken to a foster home (Mothapo, 2016). This further contributes to the phenomenon of child and youth-headed households as these young people take on the role of heading their households; thus, creating family units that are made up of siblings caring for each other or the eldest caring for the youngest and fulfilling other household responsibilities without the assistance or guidance of parents or adults (Bartoszuk & Pittman, 2010; Mukashema, 2014). Mothapo (2016) further states that in some cases, the young people would rather stay together as they fear being mistreated or exploited by foster parents/families or at times fulfilling a promise they made to their ill or dying parents. There have been instances where children have been taken in by other family members for a short while until seen to be somewhat independent and then left to care for themselves (Mothapo, 2016).

2.2. Challenges Faced by Child and Youth Headed Households

Individuals who belong in child and youth headed-households are often faced with various challenges, which may include but not limited to socio-economic difficulties; psychological and emotional problems related to the death or the absence of their parents; academic difficulties; and challenges with adapting to the new role and responsibility in the family as the heads (Beddy, 2011; Chiangwa, 2004; Francis-Chizororo, 2010 & Van Der Walt, 2013).

2.2.1. Socio-economic Challenges.

According to Hall (2019), child-headed households are often found in the poorest households with approximately "88% of children living in child-only households are in the poorest 20% of households" (p. 220). Furthermore, Hall (2019) indicates that in the absence of adults who would often provide care and security, individuals living in youth-headed households become vulnerable to living in poverty as there is poor access to stable/reliable income and low access to services such the child/social grant. According to The National Youth Development Agency report (2018), unemployment and poverty is one of the biggest challenges affecting the youth in South Africa, where children who have been orphaned are more prone to living in poverty when compared to children living in households with both parents, with data showing that "poverty levels among youths aged between 18 and 24 years being at 58,6%" (p. 13). Meintjies et al (2010) further highlights how not having adults to support the family financially while trying to cope with sustaining a household, often leads to the heads of child and youth-headed families becoming vulnerable to being exploited or may end up engaging in risky behaviour in order to get some income.

A study by Tsegaye (2007) reported that children from child-headed households have often engaged in risky child labour due to the dire economic situations experienced in their households. Furthermore, as a way of trying to get an income, the young people would often partake in domestic employment (usually girls) offering services like cleaning or babysitting

(Tsegaye, 2007), and being involved in informal trading where they sell fruits and vegetables (Dlungwana & Sathiparsad, 2008). At times, young girls become vulnerable to sexual harassment and partake in transactional sex for money and/or to receive other basic needs such as food and clothing (Shetty, 2003). In the desperate need to make money in order to sustain their households, the heads of child and youth-headed households do

not only engage in forced labour or dangerous work, but they often also drop out of school early in order to focus on making money and caring for their siblings (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007).

2.2.2. Academic Challenges.

When young people are forced to take on adult roles and responsibilities without the appropriate guidance from other adults, their academic participation is often disrupted resulting in increased school dropout rates (National Youth Policy, 2020-2030). Various studies have suggested that children from child- and youth-headed households are often likely to not attend school regularly or drop out of school early, in comparison to children said to be from 'normal' households. A study in KwaZulu-Natal found that children from child-headed households reported that being orphaned had a negative impact on their schooling as they would often fall behind on schoolwork due to needing to stay home to care for their siblings, especially when they fell ill, resulting in some individuals dropping out of school either temporarily or permanently (Dlungwana & Sathiparsad, 2008). Another study conducted in Rakai District in Uganda, reported that the heads of the households often dropped out of school after primary school and indicated that paying school fees was a major challenge for them, even though they were aware that getting an education and skills would help them have a better life in future (Dalen et al., 2009). Findings in Dalen's et al. (2009) study further highlighted that even though these children would at times have their school fees paid in half, they reported being unable to raise money to pay off the fees, and would be sent home for not having the appropriate school uniform or the necessary learning material.

Studies by Dlungwana and Sathiparsad (2008); and Maqoko and Dreyer (2007) have also reported that orphaned children from child-headed households would often report feeling unhappy and embarrassed by not being able to afford things like school fees, school uniform or having pocket money. The worry of being in such a situation resulted in them feeling it is better to not go to school but rather finding employment (Dlungwana & Sathiparsad, 2008; Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). Beegle et al. (2006) highlighted that in some schools, teachers were able to identify some behavioural problems affecting children who have been orphaned and part of child-headed households. They identified the children as being aggressive and displaying disruptive behaviour and concentration difficulties in class. Furthermore, a study by Oghuvbu (2010) also highlighted that children from child-headed households would often show malnutrition, behavioural problems such arriving late

at school, high absenteeism, not consulting with teachers when they are having problems and some learners had a negative attitude towards attending school, further resulting in poor performance. These studies have indicated some of the challenges faced by children from child-headed households when it comes to academics and perhaps their experience may have been different if they had parental or adult involvement. Having parents or adults who are supportive and involved in the child's school often results in improved and at times consistent academic participation by children, however, in the absence of parents, children often struggle and gradually withdraw from school (Evans, 2010; Mothapo, 2016; Ritcher & Desmond, 2008).

2.2.3. Psychological and Psychosocial Challenges.

According to Dalen et al. (2009), most studies that have been conducted about orphanhood in Sub-Saharan Africa have often focused on factors that are easily observable and easy to address, such as socio-economic factors, access to basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and education. Dalen et al. (2009) further indicated that psychological and/or psychosocial challenges have received limited attention, however, research that has focused on orphans' experiences have highlighted the need for studies that would also highlight the psychosocial and developments needs within these households (Atwine et al., 2005; Foster, 2002).

Individuals from child- and youth-headed households have experienced loss of their parents or caregivers due to death, especially during the times when the HIV and AIDS epidemic was still high and means of managing this epidemic were still being discovered. A study that focused on the impact of the AIDS epidemic on South Africa's children conducted by Gow and Desmond (2002) reported that the death of parents or caregivers can contribute to psychological difficulties and have an impact on children's emotional wellbeing; as the death of their parents means they experience a lack of support, love, unmet needs and guidance which can result in psychosocial depression. According to Rando (2004), after losing a loved one, a person experiences different yet natural emotions relating to grief and bereavement, where the distressing emotions can impact on a person's mood, behaviour, cognitive and social functioning. Furthermore, Bower (2005) highlights that people often experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, guilt, anger, despair and loneliness after the loss of a loved one. This could also have an impact on their cognitive functioning resulting in low self-esteem, pre-occupation with the death of their loved ones, having a sense of hopelessness and often difficulty with memory and concentration, which may a have negative impact on young people who are still in school.

This finding was echoed by Dalen et al. (2009) who reported on their study's observations where the heads of the households exhibited high levels of distress, very low and fragile self-esteem and indicated that it was difficult coping with the loss of their parents and being left to deal with the challenges they experienced. Therefore, they would often feel hopeless and constantly worrying about the future. A recent study by Ntuli et al. (2020) also indicated that the death of parents is often difficult for children resulting in some psychological problems (i.e., sadness, anger, frustration, anxiety, fear, emotional pain and shock, yearning for parents) and that in most cases, orphans do not have anyone to share their grief with and would often mourn alone, further contributing to the sense of helplessness and hopelessness experienced in these child and youth headed households. Furthermore, Ntuli et al. (2020, p. 10) study, found that the death of parents was:

> accompanied by multiple losses such as loss of the family home, loss of multiple family members, loss of support from relatives, loss of friendships, loss of educational opportunities and future aspirations, and loss of childhood, which further contributing to their psychological vulnerability.

These findings were reported to be similar to other research studies (Francis-Chizororo, 2010; Gilbert & Charles, 2012; Popoola & Mchunu, 2015). Authors from another study have also stressed how being predisposed to these factors can lead to long term psychological challenges, especially because orphans from child or youth-headed households are rarely afforded the opportunity to properly mourn and grieve the loss of their parents (Nyamukapa et al., 2010).

As previously noted, the loss experienced by individuals in child-headed households is not only limited to death, but also the absence or abandonment of parents who are still alive, may also present psychological challenges for the children. According to Hall's (2019) analysis of the national household survey regarding circumstances of child-headed households in South Africa, it was reported that not all children from child-headed households were orphans as some of them still had a living mother or father but they were not present or active in the children's lives. This is also echoed by Morwe et al. (2015) who highlights that absent fatherhood could be understood as either the biological father not living with his children and/or failing to fulfil their parental duties and responsibilities in caring for his children.

There has not been much research that has focused on the formation of child or youth-headed households due to abandonment or absence of parents who are still alive and how that has impacted on the young people. For the present study however, some participants reported on the absence of parents, particularly the absence fathers. Participants shared how even though the parent may still be alive, they have never met their children or in some cases have met and lived with them, but never provided any financial or emotional support even when they were aware of the challenges the children faced. Eddy et al. (2013) further indicated that an absent father is not limited to them being physically available or distant but also involves the "emotional disengagement from the child's life" by the father (p. 13) and highlighted that there is a gap in South African research focusing on the fathers who are emotionally absent rather than just physically.

Some studies have reported that South Africa has a high number of absent fathers in families/households, especially among the black community and this has presented some social and developmental challenges for children growing up in those families/households (Eddy et al., 2013; Makusha & Richter, 2014). According to Morwe et al. (2015), previously the phenomenon of absent fathers in South Africa was attributed to apartheid as it encouraged migrant labour, where men would leave their families for work, and some men would still send money home to their families. However, this is not necessarily the case currently and the number of absent fathers is still on the rise.

Eddy et al. (2013) and Morwe et al. (2015) further indicated that children need paternal influences that are nurturing, with open communication, provide moral and ethical guidance, offer emotional support in terms of distress. This is important for a child's development and well-being as it offers the child opportunities for self-development. However, if fathers are hardly available for their children, they prevent such relationships and family bonding to occur which may impact the children negatively and leave them feeling abandoned. In their study,

Makusha and Richter (2014) indicate that often when a father is present in their child's life, the

child may have good self-esteem, fare better at school and are able to feel secure in relationships with the opposite sex as they get older. Furthermore, Makusha and Richter (2014) highlighted the importance of fathers acknowledging paternity in Black African families, as this allows the child to receive their clan's name, which they indicate

provides significant social capital because it links the child to resources, protection, and other people in the community, while also providing a sense of identity, membership, and belonging to the wider extended family, even when the father himself is absent from the house hold (p. 986). Therefore, if a child is not properly acknowledged by the paternal family, it may be challenging for them to have a close relationship with their paternal extended family, and may feel isolated, abandoned and shameful as they feel like they do not belong (Makusha & Richter, 2014). These studies have highlighted the significant role that fathers play in a child's psychological and social development and how absence of the father and lack of support could have a negative impact on them.

Other studies that have explored the psychological and/or psychosocial challenges of children from child-headed households, have also highlighted how the role of being the head in these families has been challenging. A study by Chilangwa (2004) reported that children from child-headed households often struggle with the stress involved in the process of taking on the parental/adult role and responsibilities with minimal resources needed to survive. Furthermore, these children may experience some form of psychological trauma as they often become vulnerable to being taken advantage of, and exposed to experiencing violence, neglect and abuse (either physically and/or sexually), as they do not have adults caring for them (Chilangwa, 2004; Mothapo, 2016).

A study by Walsh and McGoldrick (2013) highlighted that it was not uncommon for parents or caregivers who are overwhelmed to delegate some responsibilities to the eldest child, who are at times even labelled as the "man of the house" or "little mother" (p. 24). This may be seen as functional in preparing for a time when children are left to care for themselves, however, it should not impede on the child's development and have their needs neglected. A study by Dalen et al. (2009) reported that on the surface, the heads of the youth-headed households would seem as though they did not constantly think about their parents however, the significance of losing their parents would be apparent when they feel overwhelmed and are faced with challenges that their parents would normally solve. When this happens, the children are left feeling sad and anxious, especially if they do not have the support of extended family and have moments of asking the question 'why me or why us'.

Meaning why should they have to suffer the pain of being in their own while other children have parents and stable homes with supportive family (Dalen et al., 2009).

2.3. Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory

For the present study, Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was used as a theoretical framework that supports this research study. The Ecological Systems Theory as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) was based on the idea that an individual does not develop in isolation but rather within a system that is interlinked with interdependent interactions. According to this theory it is important to understand social systems within which the individual exists, as it highlights the interplay of mutual relationship between the individual and their environment and the accommodations that occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In his theory, Bronfenbrenner (1977) highlights that the interactions that take place within these systems and the environment are not rigid and may change. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines development as individuals having the ability to have an evolving conception of their ecological system regarding how they relate to their environment and having the capacity to explore, sustain or make changes when needed. This highlights how the individual's relationship with their environment may also change over time (Van Der Walt, 2013).

The ecological systems theory is relevant to this research study as it provides a platform to explore and understand how individuals who are heading youth-headed households interrelate with the different environmental systems surrounding them. Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights how as a person develops, they are not merely a clean slate for the environment to make a mark, but rather they may also be dynamic and find progressive ways of influencing their social milieu (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Hook (2013) further elaborates on this notion stating that "Individuals are in fact capable of adapting their imagination to the constraints of objective reality, and even of refashioning their environment so that it is more compatible with their abilities, needs and desires" (p. 502). This notion provides a relevant lens for this particular research study, as it reminds the researcher to be cognisant of the interaction between the participants (being the individuals) and the system surrounding them. As this research study is aimed at understanding the experiences of individuals heading youth-headed households, it became evident that some of the participants have been heading their households since childhood. They have had to adapt to their changing environment, finding different ways to gather resources needed to sustain not only themselves but their siblings and ensuring that their family unit survives.

Therefore, reflections that were shared by the research participants (which will be discussed later) will highlight how the developing relationship and interactions between themselves and the systems surrounding them (e.g., extended family, community, social organisations, beliefs) have had an impact on how they experience their lives and the roles they play as head of their households.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) theorises that in order to understand human development one cannot merely observe the behaviour of the individual but should also go further and examine the "multi-person systems of the interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing he subject" (p.

514). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of development describes five levels of the environmental system that are important in understanding an individual's behaviour in relation to their environment. These levels are namely, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, where each layer constantly interacts and influences each other, as what happens in one system can affect or have an impact on how an individual functions in the other systems (Donald et al., 2006; Visser, 2007).

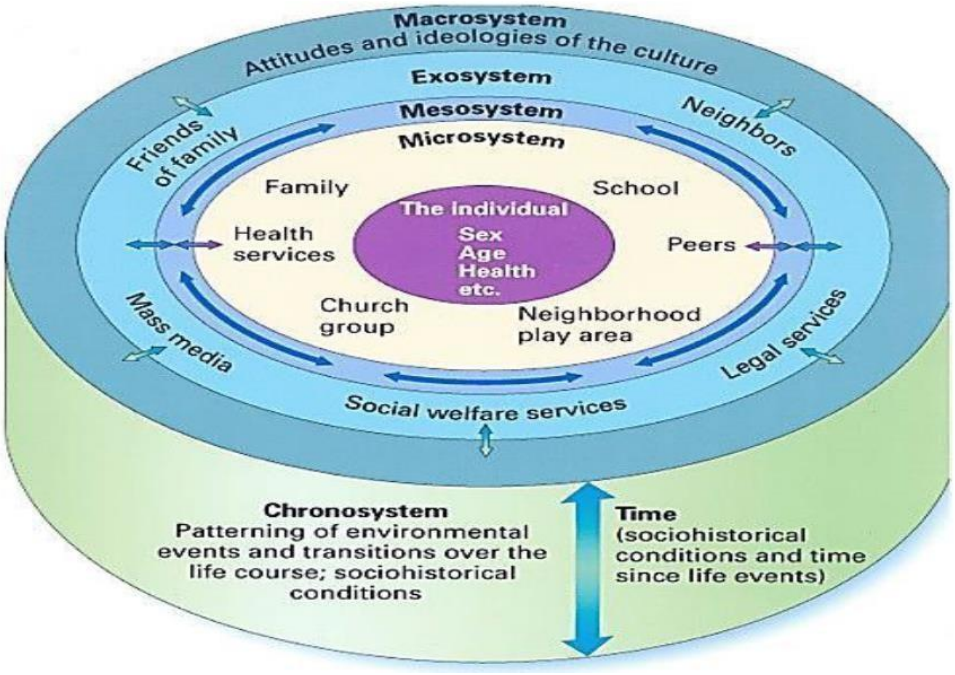


Figure 2.3.1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Source: http://sheldon-penny.livejournal.com/290935.html

The first level is the microsystem and it is described as the immediate context (such as family, home, school, day care) that influences one's development as it allows for direct interaction between the individual and their environment (Visser, 2007). This level creates a bi-directional relationship between the developing individual and the figures in their lives, such as parents, siblings, family/caregivers and friends (Hook, 2013). As this research will also explore the interaction between the heads of the households and their siblings/family members, it is important to understand the interaction and influences at this level of the system in order accurately capture the participant's experiences and also being able to understand the transition with other levels of the system.

According to Ndaleni (2012, p. 6) "family is central to youth-headed households as it provided support, nurturing, security and love in the upbringing of the child", therefore, it is important to understand how this young people maintain their family units without parents/adults, who would normally be the ones running the household.

The second level is the mesosystem, which is described as the layer where interactions between the individual's microsystems take place, however, the interaction has an indirect impact on the individual. These interactions can for example occur between a child's parents and teachers or as an example described by Visser (2007) it is "when values taught at school and at home correspond, the child will probably learn the values, when the values do not correspond, the child may become confused" (p. 25). This interaction could be experienced by individuals living in youth headed households where their teachers or neighbours who are aware of the challenges these children experience, decide to connect with each other and seek ways they can support or help out individuals living in these households.

The third level is the exosystem which is a layer where certain interactions in the individual's larger social system or environment occur, without directly being connected to the individual, however can still influence the individual's development (Berk, 2000, as cited in Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Visser (2007) indicated that this level "describes the community environment level, such as the medical, educational and recreational resources in the neighbourhood and may also be referred to as the organisational level" (p. 25). For individuals in youth-headed households these systems may for example include social services, nongovernmental non-profit or

organisations (NGO/NPO) and health services, as these are systems they rely on or have had to interact with at some point in their development.

The fourth level is the macrosystem which is referred to as the overarching institutional level of social, political, economic and cultural systems, from which the micro, meso and exosystem are a manifestation of (Visser, 2007). At this level we find the values, beliefs, norms, traditions, social class, legal systems, policies that govern and/or influence behaviour and functioning of societies (Visser, 2007). Any decisions or new policies that are implemented by government will have a cascading influence on other levels in the system, like for example if government stopped providing funding for social development and social grants were taken away, it will negatively impact the people receiving those grants and affect their livelihoods, especially if that was the only income they had. This scenario is especially relevant to individual's living in youth-headed households as they often rely on support they receive from social grants or social welfare which is often the only financial support they have.

The last level is the chronosystems. Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicated the dimension of time, which was termed as the chronosystem, as being an important factor as it involves environmental transitions over a period of time, while also influencing the individual's psychosocial development (Berk, 2000, as cited in Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

Hook (2013) further states that "time is important as it entails patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life-span, while referring to the sociohistorical placement of the individual" (p.507). These transitions may include an individual moving from childhood, adolescence and into young adulthood (Van der Walt, 2013) and having to understand the shifts that have occurred not only to them but also to their surrounding systems, which participants in this research will have also reflected on in relation to their lives. The death of parents or caregivers is quite significant for individuals in youth-headed households as they have been forced to transition and adapt to living without parents and surviving on their own and the impact is not temporary but felt over time. Furthermore, this idea is particularly significant in this research study as it encourages the researcher to explore not only the participants' current lifestyle, but to also take into account the various life transitions they have encountered throughout their lives and how these have influenced how they experience their world or reality.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter was aimed at exploring and reviewing various literature on child and youth-headed households in South Africa and the African content. Literature that was readily available was predominantly focused on 'child'-headed households and only a few studies were focused on 'youth'-headed households. The phenomenon of child and youth-headed households was discussed, indicating the impact that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had and contributed to the rise of these households. Furthermore, the literature also highlighted how changes in the country and increase in poverty has contributed to the decline of traditional family systems, where previously orphaned children could be taken in by their extended families. However, with the rise of poverty/unemployment, it is becoming difficult for systems to absorb the children, thus also contributing to the formation of child and youth-headed households. The literature reviewed in this chapter also shared the various challenges that individuals from child and youth-headed households experienced and continue to experience, which included socio-economic, academic, psychological and psychosocial challenges; highlighting how these young people are often left to deal with these difficulties on their own, without parents to help them. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was also discussed as this theory was relevant for the research study. The theory encourages us to explore each individual's development in relation to their environment and how changes in each level of the system can influence and impact other levels and the individual. Therefore, this theory can help us understand the experiences of young people living and heading their youth-headed households and the changes that their families have had to endure, and how that has impacted on them.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the research methodology adopted in this study. It discusses the research design, sampling, data collection strategies, method of analysis, ethical considerations and researchers' reflections on the study. According to Zografou (2012), research may be guided by the type of questions that the researcher is interested in understanding, thus influencing the required research methodologies to be used in conducting the research and answering the questions. For this study, the following research questions were posed: How do young people in youth-headed households experience being the head of their households and having to care for their siblings?; How do these young people understand and maintain their youth-headed family units and what challenges and support have they encountered while taking on this responsibility?; How has their experience of heading a household impacted them?; and in order to answer these research questions, the researcher used a qualitative research approach and the methods used will be discussed in this chapter.

3.2. Research Study Design

"Qualitative research focuses on a phenomenon that occurs in natural settings (real world), studying these phenomena in all their complexities" (Department of Psychology & Sociology, 2010, p.93). Therefore, it was imperative that as a researcher, I recognized the different dimension and layers that may exist within my research study in order to correctly portray that particular research in its multifaceted forms (Department of Psychology & Sociology, 2010). For this research study, a qualitative research design was used with a Phenomenological research approach. According to Laverty (2003), phenomenology may be understood as focusing on the realities and lived human experiences, aimed at meaning creation to establish understanding of their world. Therefore, this approach was used in this study as the research is interested in understanding and interpreting the experiences and meaning making for individuals heading their youth-headed households.

A phenomenological approach focuses on describing an experience of a phenomena that individuals have in common, thus, exploring these various experiences in relation to their environment, with the aim of discovering how these experiences may influence how people process and create meaning for their lives (Zografou, 2012). Furthermore, Fuster (2019) mentions that it is important to understand the experiences shared by individuals through various narratives as this allows us to further understand the dynamics that individual faces within their

context. This is important for this research study as it aims to understand and share the experiences of the young individuals who are playing the role of heading their youth-headed families, which is a phenomenon that is different to what is considered a 'normal' family setting. According to Fuster (2019), when using the phenomenological approach, "the most important point is to understand that the phenomenon is part of a significant whole and there is no possibility of analysing it without the holistic approach in relation to the experience to which it belongs" (p. 219). This notion also supports Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory used in this research study, by highlighting that an individual's experience or stories shared, cannot be understood or analysed in isolation, as each individual exists within an ecological system with various levels that one engages with and can therefore, influence one's reality and meaning making.

Sloan and Bowe (2014) further elaborate that research in a phenomenological approach does not focus on the 'truth' but rather wants to uncover the participant's perception of what is true for them, based on their experiences and sense of reality. This therefore, indicates the importance of being able to allow participants in this research to express themselves and be open about their experiences and how these have possibly shaped their view of the world, thus influencing their meaning creation. As this research was aimed at not only gathering information on the experiences, but also interpreting the information, it was important to be aware of the meanings attached to the stories/encounters that were shared by participants and not to lose the essence of these stories when interpreting these texts later.

3.3. Sample

For this study a purposive sampling strategy was used as the study focused on a specific group of people: youths who are heading their households. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) highlight that purposive sampling allows the researcher to select a population that exhibits particular characteristics/elements that will represent the presented topic, and participants should provide the best information to address the purpose of the research. For this research study, the inclusion criteria was that participants had to be over the age of 18 years old and heading their household/family, including caring for their siblings. Therefore, individuals who were younger than 18 years and had not been heading their households and caring for their siblings were not eligible to partake in the study.

Five young adults, both male and female, between the ages 19-35 years, were selected with the assistance from an NGO based in Katlehong (East of Johannesburg). Due to the nature of the research, it was difficult to gain access to the required participants, hence, an NGO that focuses on helping these kinds of households was approached to help source for participants. The table below illustrates a brief description of the sample used in the study:

Table.1: Summary of demographic profile of the participants

Participant	Age	Race	Gender	No. of siblings /children under care	No. of people in household	Cases leading to youth heading household
A	26	Black	Female	2	5	Death of mother and abandonment/absence by father who later died
B	24	Black	Male	1	2	Abandoned by mother; never met their father; Death of grandmother who was primary caregiver
C	20	Black	Male	1	2	Death of mother; never met father; and abandoned by extended family
D	26	Black	Female	3	5	Both parents died
E	31	Black	Female	9	10	Both parents died

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used in-depth interviews in collecting information from all five participants. Semi-structured interviews (Appendix A), lasting approximately 1 hour were used to collect the data. The interview schedule was developed by the researcher and the research supervisor and was guided by the literature. The literature used to develop the questions focused on experiences of child-headed households (Dlungwana, 2014;

Mathebula, 2014; Mothapo, 2016) and dissertation by Ndaleni (2012) who focused particularly on the topic of youth headed-households.

The interview schedule consisted of 14 questions in total, made up of demographic background questions, used to gather data on the participant's age, area where the household is situated, the number of children in the household and any educational background of the participant. Then, the main questions focused on understanding the circumstances that lead to the participant being the head of the household, how they felt and how they experienced their role. The interview questions also focused on understanding how they constructed their family, what made the children stay together and the different roles each person plays forming their family. Audio-recording was used to capture the interview in order to ensure accuracy for later transcription and interpretation of the data collected.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Due to the topic being deemed sensitive, identifying individuals from these households was challenging. Ethical clearance was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee for Non-medical Research (School of Human and Community Development) of the University of Witwatersrand (MCLIN/18/006 IH), before the research was conducted. Following this, the researcher approached gate keepers from various NGO's and Adult Learning Centres in order to gain to access, identify and meet with potential participants. One NGO whose name will be kept confidential, was identified and the researcher met with the Head of the NGO (also the head social worker) to request assistance in sourcing participants for the study. The researcher found the NGO after searching on Facebook for organisations or NGO in Johannesburg that assisted young people. The NGO's contact number and address were available on their Facebook page and the researcher tried to contact the NGO telephonically to no avail. Following the failed telephonic attempts, the researcher went to the NGO's office based in Katlehong and advised the receptionist that she needed assistance with sourcing participants for the research study. The researcher was then allowed to speak to the person heading the NGO (at the time of the research) who was also the head social worker.

Communicating with the head of the NGO via email was a challenge as she often did not respond to emails. Therefore, communication was either telephonically (NGO head provided the researcher with her cell-phone number) or face-to-face when the researcher went to the NGO's offices. The researcher then explained her

research proposal and shared the research participant information sheet with the head of the NGO during their initial meeting, and requested assistance in sourcing for participants as the NGO worked with young people and families in the area. The Head of the NGO was willing to assist, however, requested that the researcher provide proof from the university stating that she was a student conducting research. Upon receiving the letter (signed by then supervisor and course coordinator for the Clinical Psychology master's class), it was submitted personally to the head of the NGO. Following receipt of the letter, the head of the NGO verbally agreed to assist the researcher source for participants and delegated one of the centre's coordinators to assist. The head of the NGO also indicated that they usually have monthly or presentation sessions/meetings (when they do not have speakers or people to present, they do not have the meeting), where they invite speakers to motivate the youth or invite them for projects in the community. She therefore, proposed that the researcher attends one of the meetings to present the proposed research study and invite young people who were heading their households to be part of the study should they be interested and willing.

The researcher therefore, attended one of the sessions/meetings on the 2nd of November 2018 (only session she attended), where the coordinator introduced her to and allocated time for her to present and share her research proposal with the young people who attended; and to also to request for participants who would be willing to engage and volunteer to be part of the research study and process. The researcher requested that those who were interested to be part of the study, should speak to the NGO's coordinator after the session/meeting and leave their contact details in order for the researcher to contact them directly and receive consent to work with them. From the one session/meeting, seven young people shared their details and gave permission to the coordinator to share with researcher, however, only five participants ended up being part of the study, as the other two could not be reached.

Five participants (two males and three females) volunteered to take part in the research and the researcher arranged time to meet with the participants at the centre to conduct the individual interviews. One of the female participants indicated challenges with coming to the centre on the set date for the interview, and requested the researcher to come to her home as she could not find someone to look after her child and her niece. Therefore, her interview was conducted at home. Before the interviews commenced, the researcher informed each participant again about the study, speaking in both English and IsiZulu as some of the participant preferred

communicating in isiZulu, and reminded them that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to.

Furthermore, the researcher requested written consent from each participant to partake in the study and to audio-record the interviews. The researcher explained to participants that only she and her research supervisor would have access to the audio-recordings and that their information will remain anonymous and information shared to remain confidential. Before and even during the interviews, the researcher indicated to the participants that they were welcome to ask question if they needed clarity or further information regarding the study. The interviews were conducted individually with each interview lasting approximately 1 hour in length. Smith (1996) highlights how important it is for the interviewer or researcher to develop empathetic listening skills as this can help participants feel free to express themselves and allowing for rich data to be collected and analysed. Therefore, having this in mind, it reminded the researcher of the sensitivity of the research and for her to develop an interview method that would also account for dealing with any emotional or personal issues that would arise during the interviews.

For the interview sessions, the researcher asked the questions from the interview schedule and using the semi-structured interviews process, she approached the interviews as having a more informal conversation with the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher also kept in mind the suggestions by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) that during the interview, the researcher must begin the conversation with a small talk that can help break the ice and assist in building rapport with the participant. It was easier for the researcher to build rapport with participants as she had previously met and spoken to them at the initial meeting when she presented her study. Furthermore, during the interviews the researcher was courteous and respectful to her participants, showing genuine interest in what participants said by listening attentively, smiling, maintaining eye contact and nodding as the participants answered the questions (Mothapo, 2016). This also allowed the researcher the opportunity to probe or further explore a response where either clarity or more information was needed.

If during the interview, a participant became distressed as having to talk about some of their life experiences seemed difficult, the interview was paused and containment was provided by the researcher until the participant’s distress was eased. Participants were also reminded about having counselling arranged for them by

the centre should they still feel distressed following the interviews; however, they each declined the counselling services at the time but indicated that they would inform the centres coordinator should the need arise at a later time. The responses from the interviews were then transcribed verbatim, and some parts translated by the researcher (who is also an isiZulu speaker) from isiZulu to English; and the information was arranged into table so it could be analysed and themes could be generated. The transcripts were also shared with the research supervisor for the process of analysis. Both the transcripts and audio-recordings were kept in a password protected computer, accessible only to the researcher.

3.6. Data Analysis

For the present study, the researcher used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method to analyse the data. Smith and Osborn (2006) indicate that the aim of this approach is to provide insights on how a person in a given context experiences and make sense of a particular phenomenon within their social world. Smith and Eatough (2006) further indicate that usually the phenomena that is experienced is related to major life events or the development of significant relationship that have personal significance to the participants. This form of analysis therefore, also allows for a detailed analysis of the participants personal experiences, pairing this with the researcher's own interpretation of the information collected and this can be classified as an expression of double hermeneutics. The collected data from participants and the researcher's interpretation will therefore allow for generic experiential themes to be generated (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Similarly, the researcher thought this form of analysis would be appropriate as the present study sought to understand and describe the lived experiences and challenges of youth who grow up heading child-headed households. The following steps were followed for analysis as recommended by Smith and Eatough (2006):

Step 1: Reading and re-reading

The first step of an interpretative phenomenological analysis involves the researcher immersing themselves with the collected data, from transcribing the audio-recording to reading and re-reading the transcribed data. The data that has been transcribed has be to read a number of times and the researcher making notes on the left-hand margin regarding what appears interesting and/or significant about what the participant said and what will be valuable and relevant for the study. Smith and Eatough (2006) indicate that it is important at this first stage of analysis that the researcher reads and re-read the transcripts closely so as to become familiar with personal

experiences of each participant, but also because each reading of the data has the potential to highlight new insights that can be helpful on this study.

Step 2: Developing emergent themes and searching for connections

After reading and re-reading the transcripts, the researcher made notes of the emerging themes which was listed on a separate sheet of paper in chronological order, based on the sequence of the transcripts. Following this, the researcher started identifying any connections or links between the information and the initial themes generated and moved to the next stage which involved a more analytical ordering, in terms of the connection of the themes and which belonged together for the purpose of theoretical links, interpretation and writing up of the data (Smith & Eatough, 2006). This form of analysis may seem alliterative as it requires a close interaction between the reader and the text from each transcript/case before progressing to the next stage of analysis (Peat, Rodriguez & Smith, 2018).

Step 3: Seeking patterns and grouping themes together as clusters

Smith and Eatough (2006) indicate that when using this form of analysis, a single participant's transcript can be written up as a case study in its own right, however the analysis can also move to incorporate interviews from a number of different individuals. For the present study, interview transcripts from the five participants were analysed. Smith and Eatough (2006) further highlight that whichever approach is adopted, it is important for the researcher to be disciplined enough to distinguish repeating patterns but also acknowledge new information emerging when working through the transcripts. The aim of this, is for the researcher to work with the data by respecting any similarities or discrepancies that emerge and recognizing patterns in order to appropriately group the themes together and creating of any subthemes where necessary for the purpose of writing up the data (Smith and Eatough, 2006). As a purposive sample was used with the same interview questions being asked, the researcher was able to establish a sequence to track patterns from the responses and highlight where either similarities or differences were observed and grouping the information in order to establish the appropriate themes.

Step 4: Tabulating themes in a summary for interpretation and write up

The final stage involves using a table to arrange the grouped themes and subthemes, connecting these with the shared accounts from the transcripts where each participant outlined their personal experiences, for the

purpose of interpreting and writing up the data. Furthermore, this stage is focused on the translating of themes into a narrative account (Smith & Eatough, 2006), as it involves moving the interpretation to a deeper level by reviewing the themes across the data and the researcher aiming to further elicit meaning of the participants experiences (Peat et al., 2018). Therefore, for this study the researcher created a table with the themes and subthemes listed on the left column and direct quotes from the transcripts for each participant listed on the right column which was linked to the corresponding theme.

Furthermore, the researcher went through the information arranged in the table and for each theme in order to understand the narratives that were presented and establish a pattern that will be used in interpreting and writing up the findings, to ensure that the experiences and meaning of the information is accurately captured and reflected in the study. The researcher will therefore, also use theory and with support of literature to further explore and present the findings of the study in a coherent analytical manner, while also including participant's quotes and detailed interpretative commentary from the data (Peat et al., 2018).

3.7. Ethical Considerations

As the research study involved discussing information that may be deemed as sensitive, there are various ethical considerations that were considered to prevent any harm or wrong doing during the research process, ensuring that participants are respected and that the process is fair (Morrow, 2008). Ethical clearance to conduct this study was therefore, obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee for Non-medical Research (School of Human and Community Development) of the University of Witwatersrand (MCLIN/18/006 IH). The following ethical considerations were implemented for this study:

The researcher approached an NGO in Katlehong and after meeting with the head of the NGO and discussing the proposed research, the head of the NGO verbally agreed to assist the researcher source for participants at the centre and suggested that the researcher present the proposed research study during their monthly sessions/meetings with the youth. Following the presentation of the study, the researcher received contact details of individuals who met the criteria and were interested in being part of the study and contacted them to schedule interviews. During the one-on-one interviews, the researcher once again explained the purpose of the research, taking each participant through the participation information sheet, research procedure and explained the purpose of the informed consent letter. The researcher also informed the participants that all

interviews will be audio-recorded and received written consent from participants for audio-recording. The informed consent letter was written in simple language, however, the researcher also verbally translated into isiZulu to make it easier for the participants to understand and to address any questions or concerns the participants had. It was also important that the participants were made comfortable in order to allow them to share their experiences freely, therefore, they were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and they were allowed to withdraw from the study during the data collections, however, it would not be possible to do so once the research has been submitted for marking and possible publication.

The researcher further explained the bounds of confidentially that were applicable during the research and elaborated on the limitations and when these may be broken (if there is an indication of any harm either to themselves or others). The researcher explained to the participants that the information gathered would not be shared with anyone without their consent, and indicated that their personal details (e.g., names and addresses) would not be disclosed in the research but rather, pseudonyms will be used in order for their identity to be kept anonymous and confidential. The researcher also explained the bounds of confidentiality with the head of the NGO, so that the process was transparent and for the NGO to not have any expectation of receiving any information about the participants, except having access to what will be written the final submitted and examined or published research paper. Participants were informed that they may choose not to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with, without fear of being reprimanded as it was within their rights to not partake in the research.

According to Molemane (2013), participants should not be deceived during the research process, thus, the researcher reassured the participants that their needs are priority during the research and if any participant appeared distressed during the research they may withdraw from the research and supportive counselling could be arranged where necessary. The researcher had prearranged counselling with the NGO, as the head of the NGO indicated that the NGO had counselling serviced already available to young people at no cost, and this would be extended to participants following the research study should it be needed. During the interviews, some participants shared painful experiences and at times became emotional. When this happened, being empathic was important and the researcher paused the interview in order to offer containment to the participants, while allowing them the space to cry and express their emotions. The interview would continue

after the participant had calmed down and felt ready to continue the interview. Furthermore, the researcher reminded participants that counselling can be offered to them after the interviews, as the interviews may have brought up some difficult emotions that they had not perhaps revisited until the interviews. The researcher could only encourage and provide the participants with details for counselling and could not, and did not force any participant to attend, as attendance of counselling was purely at the participant's discretion. Some participants declined the counselling services offered to them, while others stated that they would revisit the idea at a later stage if needed. Furthermore, the researcher also made it clear to the participants that there would be no monetary gain in order to eliminate any misunderstanding (Ndaleni, 2012).

Once the interviews had been conducted, the transcribed soft copies and audio-recording of the collected data were kept on the researcher's password protected laptop and external drive for the duration of the research, and the electronic copies of the results were shared with the supervisor and will be kept for the use of future publication where necessary. The researcher also indicated to the participants and the head of the NGO that a copy of the research study and its findings upon successful examination of the study, can be shared with them upon their request once, which was also noted in participation information sheet with contact details of the researcher. The research report will also be available on Wits WiredSpace and may be published as journal articles and/or at conference proceedings.

3.8. Self-Reflexivity

Reflexivity is about being able to openly and objectively reflect on the research process that I am engaging in as the researcher. According to Berger (2015) "reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 220). Therefore, the process of reflexivity helps to improve the credibility and increase the level of trustworthiness of the research study, by taking into account the various individual factors of the researcher and the participants, such as their values, beliefs and biases, as these may impact the research process (Berger, 2015). For this research study, it was important for me to be self-aware and understand my position as the researcher and what that meant regarding my abilities and limitations that may exist. As an individual and a psychology student, I have always been interested and enjoyed working with young people and helping them overcome particular challenges in

life. However, for this research study, I had to remember that I was engaging with each participant as a researcher seeking information and to understand their reality, and I was not in a position to offer advice or any psychological interventions.

During the data collection process for the study, I was being trained as a student psychologist and was able to apply some of the skills I learnt during the interviews, such as actively and attentively listening, waiting for the right time to ask questions or get clarity when needed, showing empathy when a participant become emotional and allowing them time to recover and allowing participants the space to talk openly without judgment, while remaining objective throughout the process. Having grown up in a township and having been exposed to children who were running their households because their parents had to work elsewhere or had passed away and left in the care of extended family, it was important for me to share those experiences as it was not something we often discussed in our households or academic spaces. Personally, I come from a big family where there have been parental loss (either through death or abandonment) and cases where my parents or at times I would need to help in caring and providing assistance to my cousins/nephews. Therefore, it was important for me to be aware of some of my own biases that may arise, as some of the experiences/narratives shared by some participants, would be similar to what my family has experienced. However, these experiences were perhaps handled differently in my family as a way of accommodating the people who needed help at the time.

Furthermore, it was important for me to remain objective during the interviews and in presenting the findings of the study, by constantly reminding myself that the study was not about me or my family, but about the participants narratives. There was also a part of me that had to be aware and open to the notion that the experiences/narratives shared in this study by participants, may also resonate with my own family (parents, cousins, nephews & nieces). However, I was open to this as it would encourage discussions in my own family, that I wish our communities and country as whole could engage in, a discourse about the shifts in the familial system and finding sustainable ways that could help young people from child and youth-headed households manage their daily lives and challenges they encountered. Furthermore, I also had to be aware of my own privilege of having both parents who are alive and actively involved in my life, and to ensure that I do not pass any judgement to the circumstances that my participants have or continue to experience. Rather, I had to ensure

that the research process offered them a calm space that encourages openness and vulnerability, as this will aid in providing and capturing true and authentic narratives shared by participants. Therefore, to ensure that I remained objective and reflexive throughout this research process, I kept a small private notepad which was helpful for me to write down my thoughts and ways I wanted to approach the study.

I was aware that this was a sensitive topic and that finding participants would be challenging; however, I did not anticipate the extent of the challenge. It almost felt as though individuals from these households were inaccessible, and people working in some of the social development organisations were unfortunately not always helpful. As frustrating as it felt at the time, I also had to understand how these individuals could be seen as being vulnerable but also how important it was to share the knowledge, I would gain from doing this study. I was grateful for the assistance provided by the head of the NGO who was willing to assist after just having a conversation and me presenting my research proposal, without her centre gaining anything else, other than a copy of the research should they want it. Engaging with the head of the NGO, she indicated often having students coming into the NGO for different needs and indicated that she understood my frustration but also saw the value of the study. I was surprised that she did not give me any challenges as I anticipated, and her willingness to assist me without the guarantee that I would receive participants, gave me the hope the I needed to keep trying. Due to the nature of this study, patience and resilience were abilities I needed to possess as the researcher, especially when working with individuals who may be deemed vulnerable. Therefore, I had to ensure that participants felt comfortable to share their stories without any pressure or fear. This allowed for vital meanings to materialise, resulting in rich information being obtained from the research. Therefore, the research design and measures used when collecting data took into consideration the participant's circumstances, thus was able to accommodate certain needs they had to make the research experience pleasurable (Zografou, 2012).

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter explored the research methodology that was used in this research study. This research study used a qualitative research design, incorporating a phenomenological approach; as the research study was interested in gathering information and discussing the experiences of participants, using transcribed texts to interpret and find the meanings shared by each individual. This chapter also discussed the purposive sample from Katlehong that was used for this research study, which was recruited with the assistance of an NGO in the

area. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the data collection instrument and procedure that was followed, which consisted of in-depth individual interviews using semi-structured questions from the interview schedule. For the analysis of the data collected, the researcher used interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA) method, as this method allowed for detailed analysis of the reflections shared by participants in relation to their experiences and unique context. The detailed data analysis process allowed researcher to organise the collected information according to the patterns that existed and for particular themes and subthemes to emerge based on the connections. The results and findings will therefore, be discussed in the next chapter. The ethical process and considerations that were maintained throughout the research study were also discussed in this chapter, highlighting the importance of having a clear, honest and transparent process when conducting research. Lastly, the researcher also reflected on the research process they engaged in, sharing some of the challenges and motivations encountered during the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will be reporting on the findings and a discussion following the analysis of the collected data. The aim of this study was to explore and gain understanding on how individuals in youth-headed households experienced being the heads of their households, how they have managed to care for their siblings and maintain their youth-headed families, and further understand the learnings or challenges they have encountered while taking on this responsibility. The study sample comprised of five youth-headed households from a township in the east of Gauteng named Katlehong, where only the heads caring for their siblings and household were interviewed.

As this research study focused on providing insights as to how an individual in a given context experiences and make sense of a particular phenomenon within their social world (Smith & Eatough, 2006), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method was used for the analysis of the data. Furthermore, the findings will be discussed within the framework of the ecological systems theory, which highlights that an individual's development cannot be studied in isolation however, one must consider the various systems and interaction between them that contribute to that development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Other related literature was also used for the integration of findings in the discussion.

4.2. Context of participants and households

In order to gain some contextual understanding of the reported results, below is a summary table (previously added in chapter 3) illustrating the demographic profile of the participants:

Table 1: Summary of demographic profile of the participants

Participant	Age	Race	Gender	No. of siblings /children under care	No. of people in household	Cases leading to youth heading household
A	26	Black	Female	2	5	Death of mother and abandonment/absence by father who late died

B	24	Black	Male	1	2	Abandoned by mother; never met their father; Death of grandmother who was primary caregiver
C	20	Black	Male	1	2	Death of mother; never met father; and abandoned by extended family
D	26	Black	Female	3	5	Both parents died
E	31	Black	Female	9	10	Both parents died

4.3. Emerging Themes

The experiences shared by participants resulted in the following themes emerging for this research study: Loss: circumstances leading to youth-heading household; Parentified Child; Family; Abuse Experienced; Resilience; and Living in Poverty and Needing Support. The below table illustrates the main themes and subthemes that will be discussed:

Table 2: Overall profile of findings as themes and subthemes

Theme:	**Subtheme:**
Loss: circumstances leading to youth-headed the household	Death of primary caregiver
	Absent family and abandonment
Parentified child	The role impact of being the 'Head' of the family
	Caring for my siblings: challenges and conflicts experienced
Family	Concept of family
	Support
Abuse experienced	

Resilience	
Living in poverty and needing support	Unemployment & poverty
	Systematic support and/or failures

4.3.1. Loss: **circumstances leading to youth-headed household**

This theme on loss will be focusing on unpacking the findings and discussing the circumstances that led to participants becoming the head of their households and families. Doka (2002) states that loss can be referred to as something being taken away or being deprived of something one previously had or had been attached to. All participants in this research reported having experienced a significant loss, either due to death or being abandoned by a parent/s, primary caregiver (grandmother) or family members. Traylor et al. (2003) further highlight that the losses experienced within a family may force a modification or reorganisation of that family's structure and the roles that function within that household. This was the case for the participants in this study, as the loss experienced resulted in them becoming the head of their households and having to take care of their siblings/families. The role that these individuals played, will further be discussed later in this chapter.

Under this theme of loss, two subthemes were identified and will be discussed below, commencing with the 'death of a parent/s and or primary caregiver'; and followed by the 'absent family and abandonment' subtheme.

4.3.1.1. Death of parent/primary caregiver

During the interviews, it emerged that some participants were living in youth-headed households as result of the death of either their parent/s or primary caregivers (grandmother).

Therefore, this subtheme explores participant's experiences with regards to the death of a parent or primary caregiver.

In the extract below the participants share their experience of having lost their parent/s and primary care giver through death:

> Participant A: *"My mother started feeling ill in 2005 and she was sick for a long time, for almost a year actually as it was from 2005 June and she passed 2006 June because she had a stroke. His (her father) passing wasn't even painful because we were already used to taking care of ourselves and living on our own as kids and never even had that expectation to get help from anyone."*

Participant B*: "My mother was the one who used to take care of me because I was born in Mpumalanga then we moved when I was baby and found a place here, until 2003 when she decided to go. Then I stayed with my grandmother until she passed away and I was left with my younger sister."*

Participant E: *"I started looking after my siblings when I was 16 years old and it was 2004 when my mother passed away, and I actually don't know my father because he passed when I was still a baby."*

The above participants' reflections indicated that losing their parents/primary caregivers resulted in them becoming the primary caregivers for their siblings. Starting with Participant E's reflection, she shared that she lost both her parents through death and had to start looking after her siblings from a young age. Participant B shared that he lost his grandmother who had become the primary caregiver after his mother left and her death resulted in him having to look after his younger sister.

The role of a grandmother in a family, especially black families has been seen as important in caring for their grandchildren, as noted by Boon et al. (2010). They also note that, South African grandmothers have had to play the role of raising the young in their families due to parents either being unemployed, ill or deceased, unfit to parent or have abandoned their children, which was the case for Participant B. Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1979) highlights how the macrosystem is not only limited to structural relations but also involves information or practices, values, traditions and customs, that can directly or indirectly provide meaning in certain social systems. The role that grandmothers play regarding caring for orphaned children and helping to maintain households has become a norm and valued in societies, a custom that is especially practiced in black communities/townships and could be understood as belonging in the macrosystem. Therefore, when grandmothers are not available to care for their grandchildren, it contributes to the increase of youth-headed households in communities, but also impacts the individual's microsystem where they are left to care for themselves and their siblings without an adult; which was the case for Participant B in this study.

Participant A's reflections indicate that her mother died due to being ill for a few years and her father died later on. However, she describes the death of her father as having not been painful due to him being absent in their lives and them as children being used to living and surviving on their own without his assistance. Walsh and McGoldrick (2013) indicates that a death in a family cannot be seen as a short-term occurrence, but rather involving various complex changes and challenges that families have to navigate. This is due to the disruption

in the family's equilibrium and could include the possible loss of relationships, functional roles and disruption of the family unit. The loss experienced by participants in this study also highlights the various changes that these individuals have to endure, and can be viewed in relation to Bronfenbrenner's exosystem level.

Participants in this study have experienced a major life event (e.g., death of parents) that they have no control over. However, these experiences have changed the course of their lives and they will continue to experience other shifts over time as they adapt to their new roles as head of their families and caring for their siblings; thus, also impacting the chronosystem. Furthermore, the loss of a parent or primary caregiver for a young person means that their microsystem is also impacted, where the relationships they had with parents/caregivers is lost and the dynamics of the family unit changes as the young participants take on the role as the heads of the family but also the siblings having to now rely on each other rather than an adult in the household. Unfortunately, as some participants mentioned, they had to do this without the support of other family members as they were abandoned by them, which will be further discussed below.

4.3.1.2. Absent Family and Abandonment

Walsh and McGoldrick (2013) writes "Each loss ties in with all other losses and yet is unique in its meaning" (p. 21), therefore, reflections reported under this subtheme are also interlinked to the previous subtheme. Participants shared that the losses they experienced were not only due to death, but also due to being abandoned by either a parent or extended family members and sometimes having to navigate life on their own.

In the extracts below, participants C and E share their experiences:

> Participant C: *"My mother passed when I was in grade 6, so it's been 7 years now. We all don't know and have never met our fathers. It's like, my mother passed on the 7th of July then on the... I will never forget these dates... on the 18th of July she was buried,*
>
> *and the 20th of July was my birthday. They (extended family) kicked me out on the 24th of November the same year mother passed".*
>
> Participant E: *"The eldest sister left first, she found herself her own place and said she couldn't take care of us and buy food at home because we are a lot. So, we were then left with my brother, but he didn't work."*

Participant C shared that after the death of his mother, at a very young age he felt abandoned by his extended family as they chased him away. Furthermore, he reports that him and his siblings had never met their fathers. In a similar study conducted by Ntuli et al. (2020), echoing participant C's experience, they found that it was becoming common for the children/adolescents to be chased out of their homes after the death of their parents, or at times not even being able to bury them; thus, not being able to mourn or get closure after the loss.

Participant E reported being abandoned by her older sister (who would have been the primary caregiver) after their parents passed away and due to her older brother also not working, she ended up having to care for her siblings.

Dolbin-Macnab et al. (2016) highlight that "A major issue for some Black South African families is providing care to children in the absence of the child's parents" (p. 2183). The reflections shared by both participants seem to highlight the challenges that are sometimes experienced by families after the death of parents, where perhaps no plan had been arranged or discussed regarding who and how the children could be cared for; thus, resulting in family members choosing not to stay with the children/siblings. Dalen et al. (2009) who conducted a similar study in Uganda reported that due to the prevailing socio-cultural values, it was natural for extended family members to absorb the orphans/siblings into their families.

However, due to the increase in number of orphans/siblings and the socio-economic challenges where families experience high rates of poverty, families seem to have reached their maximum threshold for absorbing orphans, thus resulting in the increase of either child/sibling or youth headed households in Africa (Nakitende & Musisi, 2009). Therefore, the impact of the losses is felt across time within the chronosystem. Furthermore, this could also be the case for older siblings who fear the responsibility of having to take care of their siblings and in order to avoid conflict, they resort to leaving the household. This notion has also been highlighted in literature by Mukashema (2014) who noted that as a way of avoiding disagreements within the family, some siblings in youth-headed households would rather leave the home and try find better living conditions for themselves. This finding highlights the importance of having adequate and reliable institutions within the macrosystem that can assist communities and families, particularly with providing economic relief due to high levels of poverty or resources that can help either extended families or organisations caring for orphaned or abandoned individuals. The breakdown in these socio-cultural values and norms, further highlights the failure

by institutions in the macrosystem and how individuals like the participants in this study are then forced to find other ways to survive and maintain their households and keep their family together.

The concept of an absent parent, mainly being the fathers, was also quite common in the findings. The impact of absent fathers in the children's lives was highlighted in the literature review and Padi et al. (2014, p. 54) additionally highlight that father absence:

> includes a person who had never met their father due to either death or disappearance during the early stages of the child's life and also those who know the father but may experience feelings of abandonment and an overwhelming sense of loss and grief

This was due to them not playing an active role in their lives.

In the extract below, Participant A shares how her father would not help them and was absent even though he was alive and knew of their difficult circumstances:

> *"I needed to go to high school but didn't have any school uniform and my father wasn't buying us anything and we had to do everything ourselves"*

During the interview with Participant A, she was asked:

> *"And how did you feel knowing that your father was alive but wasn't helping you as his kids, and that you needed to start heading the household from the age of 13 years?"* to which she responded*, "It was very painful, very painful to the point where sometimes*
>
> *I would just think of killing myself... *starts getting emotional*"*

In the previous subtheme, Participant A reported that she felt no pain after her father died as they had become accustomed to taking care of themselves. In the extract above, Participant A further shares an emotional reflection, suggesting that the absence of her father, prior to his death, in their lives caused her significant distress to a point where she considered committing suicide. Walsh and McGoldrick (2013) explain that when losses are not addressed accordingly, a sense of disloyalty may occur and cause complications with attachments with the remaining parent in the family. Perhaps a part of the previous notion can be true for Participant A and the emotional distress she experienced, due to the sense of disloyalty and abandonment

displayed by her father (even before her mother passed away) when he could have provided aid when they needed him.

In the extract below, Participant B reflects on his experience of having been raised by his grandmother after being abandoned by his mother and having an absent father as he had never met him:

> Participant B*: "So we stayed with my mother until 2003 or 2004 if I am not mistaken. Then apparently, she left but we don't know where she went and there are some people who say they see her around but ya. As for my father, they split when I was about 8 months old so as you see me, I was raised by my grandmother".*

Participant B's reflection has not only brought some focus on the role that grandmothers usually play in families as caregivers, but has also highlighted that it is not only fathers who are absent in their children's lives, but that mothers also abandon their children. Even though it appears his mother was around as people reported seeing her, she did not have a relationship with her children, and this resulted in Participant B caring for his sister after his grandmother passed.

In the extract below, Participant D's reflections highlight that her and her siblings had different fathers and shares her experience of having an absent father:

> Participant D: *"There are four of us from my mother but we all have different fathers. Yes, my father was around but did not live with us and did not lend a hand in raising me. It was when traditional introduction to my ancestors was supposed to be done that he came into the picture; he was forced to step up and that is when he was formally introduced to our family."*

According to Padi et al. (2014), it is common for fathers to be absent in their children's lives either physically, emotionally and/or financially, where children would have little to no information about their fathers. Participant D explained that even though her father was not fully present in her life, he was able to make himself available when they needed to do a traditional ceremony for her. The traditional ceremony is important in some African cultures as it involves the child being officially introduced to the paternal family and recognised by the ancestors as being part of the clan, which could at times provide a sense of belonging for the child (Manyathse, 2013; Mkhize 2006; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011). Even if the ceremony is done, it does not replace the absence of the parent in the child's life and does not guarantee that any relationship will form

between the parent and the child, as seen by Participant D's reflection. The participant's reflections highlight the importance of interactions between the child's parents and their extended family with regards to ensuring that all the required cultural or traditional practices are maintained or completed so that the child does not struggle when the parents are no longer there, and feel isolated by their families. This interaction could be understood as taking place within the mesosystem because even though the child is not the one directly responsible for ensuring that this is done, if the parents and extended family have not engaged on the matter, it may impact the child or adult later in life.

Overall, this theme explored participants reflections regarding their experiences with loss as most participants reported having lost a parent/s through death while they were still very young. Participants also reflected on having been abandoned either by their extended families or by their parents, who may have been alive but played no role in raising them or helping them in their time of need. Furthermore, one participant reported being abandoned by his mother, resulting in him being raised by his grandmother, while one participant indicated that her older sister abandoned the family and left the household, therefore, highlighting that not all siblings will stay together after parents have died. The reflections shared by participants in this theme highlight how the death of a parent or primary caregiver may also be accompanied by various other losses including, loss of a home, loss of a relationship and loss of support from other family members (including siblings) (Ntuli et al., 2020); as participants had to become the caregivers and be responsible not only for themselves but also for their siblings.

4.3.2. Parentified child

This theme focuses on participant's experiences and reflections regarding the different responsibilities they had to take on as the head of their households and families. Even though the intention is not to replace their parents, as heads of their youth only family, participants in this study have had to play the role of a parent to their siblings and at times even having to sacrifice some of their own needs to ensure that the needs of their siblings are met. In early literature by Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) and Barnett and Parker (1988), the concept of 'parentification' was introduced and described as children (either one or more) who are deemed capable, and are expected to fulfil a parental role within a family system, when a parent is either not able or unwilling to fulfil their parental responsibilities. This concept aligns with the experiences shared by participants

in this study, as they had to take on that responsibility and assume the role of being "parent" within their families; which will be discussed further in the first subtheme below. The second subtheme in this section will focus on participant's reflections on some of the challenges and conflicts they encountered in caring for their siblings, and also how their siblings would sometimes help when they were struggling.

4.3.2.1. The role and impact of being the 'Head' of the family

All participants reported and shared their experiences in having to learn how to take care of themselves and their siblings, either from an early age or even before the loss of their parent/s.

In the extracts below, Participants' A, B and D share their reflections:

> Participant A: *"Since when we were young, I would normally take over and worry about what we eat even though my twin and I were the same age, I would be seen as the eldest… Especially with the last born, when she started going to high school, I had to be the one making sure she had school uniform and she was studying far from here so needed to give her transport money and everything.*"
>
> Participant B: "*I then decided that even if she (grandmother) has passed on and there are no adults, I must make sure I stay with my sister and take care of her and ensure she finishes school and everything… So, whatever I can get then that is what will share and eat, and I ensure she has money for going to school and spending money sometimes if I have extra, buy her toiletries and stuff. It is really difficult because I now had to learn about sanitary towels."*
>
> Participant D: *"When she (mother) passed on, I saw the value of what she was teaching me as no one will be helping me along and instructing me how to do the right thing. So, I realised that it was time I had to assume that motherly role and I decided to walk in her footsteps and raised my younger siblings the same way my mother raised me."*

Walsh, (2006) and Walsh & McGoldrick (2013) state that a death of a parent/s may disrupt the family structure, causing a breakdown and at times forcing a shift of relational and household patterns to occur within the family. The above reflections shared by participants echo the shift that occurred in their family unit, with participants taking on the role of the caregiver, either having learnt to do so from a young age due to challenging circumstance, or by observing and using the lessons taught by their parents when they were alive.

Thus, they used the interactions that they had experienced in the microsystem to inform their future interactions with their siblings.

In a similar study, Evans (2010, 2012) noted that it was common for young people who were the heads of their households (usually the eldest sibling) to often view themselves as guardians for their younger siblings, and felt high levels of moral responsibility to care for them and manage the household. This notion may hold true and may support the above participant's reflections. However, participant A's reflections also highlight that one doesn't have to be the eldest (as she had a twin sister) to take on this role, but suggest that it is when they are seen as being mature and responsible that this role will fall on them.

In the extract below, participant C also shares his experience of being the youngest, yet had to care for his older brother:

> *Interviewer: "Okay, and how does it feel knowing that you are the youngest, yet you have to almost take care of your older brother at times?"*
>
> Participant C: *"Uum, well I see it as something good actually, because I think of it this way... I ask myself if I don't take care of him then who will? Because as much as I have learnt to take care of myself, clearly, he cannot, so I might as well look after him as well and help him. Maybe I skipped some stages that I should have gone through and enjoyed. Like I just had to grow up."*

The above reflection shows how even though participant C was the youngest of the siblings, he had to be the one to assume responsibility for his older brother. It appears that he is aware that the sense of responsibility may not have been appropriate for his age, as he believes that he may have skipped some developmental stages. According to Donald et al. (2006), family systems play an important role in the social, emotional and moral development of individuals within that system. Therefore, if there is a breakdown in the family system and this role cannot be fulfilled, influences from other microsystems can aid in the individual's developmental process. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory further highlights the importance of understanding the various systematic influences within an individual's environment that can impact their development. For development to effectively occur, there would constantly be an evolving interaction between the individual and environment or system they are in (Hook, 2013). Therefore, it is possible that the experiences of these young people, such as death of parents, taking on an adult role of parenting while still being a child and having unstable family

support, paired with the environments they find themselves in, may have impacted and perhaps still continue to impact their development, due to the disruption experienced especially in their microsystems.

In the extract below Participant E reflects on some of the guilt she felt and having to make the decision to stay with her siblings:

> Participant E: "*I said I wanted to live with one of aunts and he (brother) made some comments wanting to make me feel guilty, saying "he knew I would choose to leave because my father's family have better lives". When he said that, I did feel guilty and that if I left, I would be leaving my siblings behind to suffer while I get a better life. If I left, they would have been left to stay on their own, especially my younger sister because we don't share the same father and that would have caused problems*."

Participant E's reflection highlights the emotional manipulation (either by siblings or at times other family members) and perhaps mental and emotional negotiation that the participants experienced. A study by Ntuli et al. (2020) noted that usually young people in youth-headed households had strong feelings about staying together as siblings, regardless of the daily hardships they may experience. This is true for most participants in this study, as they chose to continue staying and caring for their siblings and sharing whatever little they had with each other and having to place the needs of their siblings before their own. Evan (2012) explains this struggle stating that "Young people expressed a range of different emotions about their caring responsibilities. Many felt a moral obligation to look after their siblings following their parent's death and were proud of their caring role" (p. 24).

In a lengthy extract below, participant D further shares a reflection that seems to highlight some of the mental and emotional strain that may be felt by the young people heading family units/households:

> Participant D: "*So, being thrown into being parents whilst being a child yourself is very hard, it gets so hard that you would wish your parents were still alive. There are so many responsibilities, so overwhelming to a point where you have to forget about yourself and your needs and prioritize the younger siblings' needs, try to give them the best you can. You also have to be aware of the fact that these children are not growing in normal household like other kids they interact with, and they would ask why they don't have things they desire and don't have parents at home like other children in the neighbourhood. There are so many complex responsibilities, one wouldn't normally have in a "normal"*

family that sometimes you just feel like giving up but that still wouldn't help nor change the situation. There are days where I would just sit and cry, and I eventually snap myself out of it, wipe my tears, stand up and keep myself busy and distracted. It is sometimes helpful because that heavy thing that was sitting on my chest would feel less heavy, although I sometimes feel like I don't even know why I just broke down, but the load would feel a bit lighter as I had let it out and let some of the pain go."

Participant D's reflection highlights some of difficulties of having to be a parent to herself and her siblings, resulting in her sometimes feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities wishing her parents were still alive. Her reflection also highlights the sense of helplessness and distress that it experienced in these households and the use of distractions as a coping mechanism. Furthermore, her reflections seem to suggest that she and her siblings were aware that her role as the head of the family was not 'normal' or that their family structure was different to the norm, where the household or family would have either one or both parent/s caring for all the needs of the children. This awareness of difference would have emerged in the microsystem with interactions with friends with the idea of what 'normal families' look like being entrenched in the macrosystem. However, while the notions of family have changed across time they have not translated into cultural/societal beliefs in the macrosystem.

In addition, in the extract below, Participant E's reflections seem to echo Evan's (2010) findings where he explains how "some young people sometimes felt overwhelmed by their caring responsibilities, missed their parents and felt that they lacked an adult who they could turn to for advice and guidance" (p. 13). One of the participants shares their experience as follows:

Participant E: "*Before I would feel bad and almost cursing myself, blaming God and asking why us, why don't we have adults helping us... but over time I started accepting and understanding that you can't really learn how to be an adult."*

Even though Participant E's reflection indicates how challenging it was at times having to take on this responsibility, her reflections also suggests that she had come to terms with having to care for her siblings and heading the household. When analysing the findings shared by participants in this study, it became evident that they all had to make some sacrifices in taking on the role of heading their households and caring for their siblings. The sacrifices are not only limited to the physical or materialistic but it is important to also

acknowledge the emotional and mental sacrifices they endured. This is echoed by literature from similar studies indicating how young people heading their households and caring for their siblings had a large task to fulfil and this task was often associated with emotional, psychological and social distress, especially following a loss of a parent or caregiver (Ibebuike et al., 2014; Popoola & Mchunu, 2016; Ntuli et al., 2020). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem also involves a pattern of roles and interpersonal relationships that the individual experiences and which in turn influences their development. For participants in this study, their microsystems have endured roles being shifted as children in this system have been forced to take on the parental role and engage in activities that normally parents would do. Furthermore, by taking on this role and responsibilities, their own development may be hindered as they tend to care for their siblings and sacrifice on fundamentals like school or spending time with their peers, which will be discussed below.

In extracts below, participants share their experiences, reflecting on some of the challenges and sacrifices they had to make in fulfilling their responsibilities, some even before the death of their parent/s. Participant A and E reflect on struggling to complete school and having to drop out:

> Participant A: "*When I was in grade 7, my mother was getting sick and I started cleaning for my neighbour to get money and would use that to buy myself school uniform. But when I needed to go to high school, I didn't have any money to buy uniform or go to school and my father wasn't helping us and we had to do everything ourselves. Well, my life changed in that I had to drop out and couldn't finish school*"
>
> Participant E*: "I was going to school that was far and had to take a taxi, but my brother wouldn't want to give me taxi fare, I just felt like I wasn't coping well with all that and decided to drop out of school. Then I started to learn how to do people's hair and would do that to get some money and buy some food at home."*

In the reflections above, both participants share how they had to sacrifice their education as they could not afford to attend school regularly, even though they tried to be resourceful.

Research from similar studies by Mokgatle-Nthabu (2013), Pillay (2018) and Ntuli et al. (2020) also share similar findings on this phenomenon, where participants reported dropping out of school as a strategy in order to maintain their 'parental' responsibilities and at times perceiving this as a positive sacrifice for their siblings.

However, for some, this had negative psychosocial effects for their future goals as they ended up having no skills or qualifications and being unemployed or needing to find part-time jobs in their communities (Ntuli et al., 2020).

In the extracts below, Participant B and D further comment on some changes they experienced or had to consider regarding their social lives:

> Participant B: "*I did feel left out before, but I then realised how we usually just waste money when going out and you arrive home the next day and there is no food while you wasted the money. So, not that I don't go out, I do, but I am more responsible now, I even had to cut out some of the friends who were reckless"*
>
> Participant D: *"Being a parent whilst a teenager yourself, there are things you don't get a chance to do and experiences that your peers are experiencing, but I never focused a lot on those. Honestly, when I was in Grade 9 and Grade 10, I would cover my homework early in the morning so that I do not feel lost at school and not fall behind. Going out partying does not really concern me a lot, even when I see my peers going out to party and I cannot, that doesn't bother me. If I am not able to go, I am okay with that."*

In the reflections above, participants shared how they became aware that their social lives may be different to that of their peers and the sacrifices they would need to make because of their responsibilities. Findings in this study also suggests that existing in a different familial/household context or background to that of your friends and peers can be isolating, and as Participant B shared that he did feel left out at first, he had to adjust to different living situations. This notion is supported by Evans (2010) who reported that "young people found it difficult to spend time with their friends because of their caring responsibilities or because they were stigmatised, leading to isolation and loneliness" (p. 15). This adjustment once again indicates the changes experienced in the participant's microsystem, as interactions with friends are also impacted due to them playing a different role to that of a child in their households. This further highlights the importance of having adults (parents or a primary caregiver) in a system that can manage the role and responsibilities of caring for the children, thus allowing the children to play an appropriate role in the household and share in the social experiences similar to their peers. Therefore, by removing the adults in a system that has been functioning with

them or is known to function better with them, it means the young people in that system are then required to adapt to the change and participants in this study opted to continue caring for their siblings and maintaining their youth-headed families.

4.3.2.2. Caring for my siblings: challenges and conflicts experienced

This subtheme focuses on the participants reflections as the head of the households and some of the challenges they encounter in raising their siblings and possible conflicts. They also reflect on some of the roles that each sibling plays in maintaining and/or contributing to their family's functioning of the household.

In the extracts below, participant A, B, C and E share their reflections:

> Participant A: *"I had to talk to them (siblings) and make them understand I needed help and asked them to contribute by maybe buying bread sometimes because at the time they would work part-time and I was not working full-time."*
>
> Participant B: *It's a bit of a challenge... I can't say it's easy or fun, but in most cases it's difficult. You do come across issues where there are fights and arguments because we don't listen to each other or communicate well as children. So, being the eldest in the home is a problem because no matter what happens, they come ask you and you have to be accountable and that is not always nice."*
>
> Participant C: "*My brother is like those guys that smoke Nyaope, because like after our mother passed, he started getting involved in wrong things. I would give him the key so that when I was not home, he could get in and sleep and I trusted that he would not steal from me, but I would have that thing that maybe he would steal.*
>
> Participant E: "*I am the oldest, but I am very shy and don't like talking or shouting and my younger sister is good at that, so I usually report everything to her and she is the one who disciplines the children. They don't listen at all and it is very difficult staying and raising other people's children, it is very difficult."*

The extracts highlight the different roles each participant and their siblings have to play in managing their family units and households, and some of the challenges they encountered. Participant A shared how communicating openly with her siblings when she needed helped, allowed them to also contribute when they could. This finding is supported by Mukashema's (2014) study where it was reported that members from youth-

headed households indicated that it was important for them to share household responsibilities and make some contribution as it should not only be left to the head or older sibling, when it comes to ensuring that their household needs are met. Furthermore, Mukashema's (2014) study also noted how it should be expected that conflict or disagreements would exist in youth-headed households, as children in our societies often grow up learning that "you should obey your parent, but no one says you should obey your brother or your sister" (p. 356). Therefore, the young people who are heading these households may need to learn to enforce or perhaps negotiate their sense of authority within their families. This finding was supported by Participant B and E's reflections as they reported on experiencing challenges with delegating work or reprimanding their siblings, with Participant E further indicating how she would rely on one of her sisters to reprimand the other siblings, as she is better at that then her. Participant C on the other hand shared how even though he is the youngest of the siblings, he has had to try and ensure that his older brother was safe, while also highlighting the importance of having to rely and trust each other as siblings.

In the extract below, Participant E has further shared some of the frustrations she would encounter in having to raise her siblings:

> Participant E: "*Sometimes I would even get to a point of telling them that I don't owe any of them anything, because I also had to learn to take care of myself and make a plan to put myself through school, so I can get a job and provide for them, but they are now acting like I owe them something which I don't.*"

Participant E's reflection above seems to capture the emotional frustration and perhaps a sense of unfairness that may be experienced by individuals from youth-headed households and perhaps sometimes the heads of the families feeling like their efforts are not recognized or appreciated by their siblings. As aforementioned, the roles of each individual are important in the microsystem and when these roles change or become unclear, it may impact on the interactions within this system, which is the case for youth-headed households. Participant E's reflections highlight how growing up in a system without parent/adults and taking on the role of being the head of the households comes with challenges for all the children growing up in that system, as they have to manage the shifts in their relationships as siblings and changes in the familial hierarchy.

However, even though in the previous extract participant E shared some of her frustration, in the extract below, she also shared the importance of raising her siblings equally and using language that will be helpful rather than destroy them as children or their relationship as siblings:

> Participant E: "*I think children are not the same and you see that as you are raising them. Children are also very observant and notice when they are being treated differently, when you do something for the one and not the other. You must also watch what words you use with them, avoid using an accusing tone*."

Overall, this theme reported on participants' experiences in their role of being the heads of their households and caring for their siblings. Participants highlighted how they had to learn from a young age to care not only for themselves but also their siblings, sharing some of the sacrifices they have had to make, like for example, dropping out of school in order to find ways of making money or changing their social lifestyle. In being the head of the household, reflections shared by participants in this theme accentuates the level of responsibility they have had to assume and at times the burden that the role they play in their families may have placed on their individual lives. The findings in this theme seem to indicate the different levels of parentification that each participant experienced and the transitions they had to make when taking on the responsibility and perhaps learning new ways of caring for their siblings. However, with this being said, it is important to acknowledge how these responsibilities can become burdensome when one has to sacrifice their childhood or young adulthood due to being obligated to play the 'parental role' in order to try to maintain some balance in the family system (Hooper, 2007). Hooper (2007) and Engelhardt (2012) further elaborate that parentification can be dysfunctional when it causes disturbance in generational boundaries, where due to the functional and emotional role reversal, the child or young person has to sacrifice their own needs of comfort, attention and guidance for the accommodation of their parent or in as in the case of this study, for their siblings.

4.3.3. Family

This theme will be focusing on participant's reflections as to how they understand the concept of family and their experience with the family system, including the support or lack of support they received from their extended family members. The Government Gazette (2011) states that there is "no single definition of family, as it differs from context to context" (p. 27) therefore, this theme will explore participant's views on how they

understand and define the concept of family based on their context and individual experiences, while living in what may be seen as an unconventional family structure or household.

4.3.3.1. Concept of Family

All participants commented on the significance of family and reflected on how they define and understand the concept of family based on their experiences.

In the extracts below, Participants' A and C share similar views regarding how they understand the concept of family:

> Participant A: *"Family are people who will always be there and around for you and I have told myself that the ones who are not around have their own reasons as to why".* Participant C*: "So for me on my side I would say how I take it is, whoever looks after me I will also look after them and whoever doesn't I will also just ignore. That is how I see it."*
>
> Participant B: *"I think family is about people who are staying together in order to take care of each other and stay united, irrespective that they don't have parents and even if it's just siblings. Well, we don't even have to be siblings but it's about staying together, being united and focusing on our future."*
>
> Participant E: *"I think family can actually be surpassed by neighbours and even friends because those are the people you can go to when needing help and rely on more than extended family."*

Participant A's reflection indicates that family are people who support each other and she understands that at times some of the family members may not be available to provide that support. Participant C described his understanding of family as people who can care for each other, however, he also seems to suggest that care should be mutual and not just one sided.

Participant B and Participant E's reflections suggest that family is not only bound to people who share the same blood, but also people being together and sharing a goal can be family/united. Furthermore, they highlight that even in the absence of parents and siblings (people who share the same blood line), friends and neighbours can still form a family as those were the people that were present for them when they needed help. These reflections highlight how these young people's experiences encourage a shift from the conventional idea of family being limited to people of the same blood line, even if they are not living together. The Government Gazette (2011) provides a 'sociological' definition of family (as they explained that there is no one definition)

which states that "Sociologically, the family is defined as a group of interacting persons who recognise a relationship with each other, based on a common parentage, marriage and/or adoption" (p. 27). The reflections shared by participants in this study do not seem to dispute this notion; however, their reflections further highlight that for them family is not limited or linked to a single event (i.e., marriage, birth or adoption), but also extends to relationships and connections forged with other people in an around their community but through a process of support.

In the lengthy extract below, participant D shares her reflection on the concept of family:

> *"For me, family is a place where people show each other unconditional love and support. The reason I say this is because I did not know how to define family in the beginning, and my mom used to say: ["you will never understand as a child but if you are not responsible for something, you sometimes become blind to it. Wait until you have to personally face the challenge and you will see things for what they are. She would say, I have blood relatives not far from here (in Mandela – area in Katlehong township), but they never come to check on me or even ask how life is, but if I would have money, they would start coming here, asking me about life and how well I am doing because there would be something in it for them"]. That is why I say family is unconditional love. I started experiencing it and becoming aware of that fact when I met my father's siblings, especially my older sister. My stepmother used to tell me: ["I will never take you back home before you are grown and mature; I want you to be able to distinguish between those people who love you and those that are just using you"]. Even when I got to my father's family's main home, everyone was there to welcome me."*

Makwane (2017) indicates how family members (usually parents or grandparents) play an important role in providing not only care but also play a role in the socialisation and guidance for their children. Participant D's views on the concept of family appear to have been influenced by her mother and stepmothers' views. Although Participant D starts off by sharing an idealised view of family, her reflection also suggests that she has experienced both positive and negative aspects of family. The positive aspect being that she has experienced her paternal family being welcoming and supportive, while the negative aspect seems to stem from her mother's views of feeling a lack of support from her family. Participant D is the only participant who reflected on the idea of "unconditional love" which could be stemming from some of the positive experience she has had.

However, her reflection may also suggest or highlight how young people in these households/families may not get to experience this often because they do not have parents or a close bond with some of their family members. A similar notion was shared by Dalen et al. (2009) who wrote that, children or young people who lost their parents but received attention, guidance or assistance from their extended family members or other adults, functioned better because they felt a sense of belonging and being cared for as they would often compare themselves to children living in unbroken families.

4.3.3.2 Support and or/lack of support by family members

During the interviews, having discussed how participants defined or understood the concept of family, it was important to also understand what support, if any, they had received from their family members (including extended family members and siblings) after taking on the role of heading their households. As these were young people taking on the role that would usually be fulfilled by adults, it was important to establish if they received any guidance or assistance from other family members in caring for their siblings or support from their siblings in maintaining their family unit and household. Furthermore, understanding the relationship within the family may also help identify the gaps that may exist in youth-headed families and the support they may need. Participants seemed to share varying experiences which will be discussed below.

In the extracts below, Participants A, B and E share their reflections on the idea of support, indicating that they felt unsupported by their extended family:

> Participant A: "*We grew up knowing we had aunts and uncles, but after burying our mother they have never even once checked on us. At first, we would arrange and go visit them, but after a while it felt like we were just forcing ourselves onto them and burdening them, so we stopped and decided to just stay on our own."*
>
> Participant B*: "I would have to be the one calling first and asking for help and it got to the point where we felt like a burden, and being raised by my grandmother, she was someone who taught us that if we didn't have something, we don't have it and we should be okay with that."*
>
> Participant E: "*Extended family is always far away and actually only call you when there is something happening and want help from you but usually, they don't care to even check up on you*."

Participants A and B's reflections highlight feeling unsupported and like a burden whenever they reached out or asked for help from their family members. Furthermore, their reflections suggest that they felt rejected by their extended family members which resulted in them not reaching out anymore. Van Dijk and Van Driel (2009) support this finding as they reported that individuals from child- headed households often avoided seeking help or support from their relatives. They feared being humiliated or being rejected by family members, as they would be frustrated and tired of having to always help them out, either be it with food or money. Participant E's reflection further indicate that the extended family would only call when needing help from her but would not call to check on how they were coping.

According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), family plays an important role within the context of the microsystem, where development of an individual and interaction between family members is important. Furthermore, family also included extended family, which particularly in the African context would be expected to continue caring for children who have lost their parents and this occurrence had become the norm or custom in African communities (Mturi, 2012; Nsamenang, 2006; Van Der Mark, 2015); thus, being entrenched in the society's macrosystemic framework. Therefore, reflections by participants in this study highlight some breakdown or failures of this particular societal norm that children will be taken in by extended family and the idea that family will always stick together

The reflection shared by participants in this study indicate how failures of ideologies that exist in the macrosystem can have a negative impact on the individuals' microsystem, resulting in young people having to care and rely on each other for support, rather than their family members as they have not been present to assist them.

In the extract below, participant C reflects on a painful experience of how his family kicked him out a few months after burying his mother, rather than offering support:

> Participant C: "*They (extended family) kicked me out on the 24th of November the same year mother passed. They asked me who would support and take care of me since my mother has now died… So, for me, I don't even depend on my extended family at all. It's like the only person I depend on is my sister and my friend's aunt... just the two of them".*

Participant C's reflection seems to contradict the previously mentioned notion that with the African context, children who are orphaned or vulnerable would be taken in by their extended family and providing a place to stay and necessary support (Nsamenang, 2006). His experience and reflection highlight the lack of support that he may have needed from family after losing his mother. This resulted in him not being able to depend on his extended family and only relying on his sister and his friends' family, as they provided better support during that time. Ntuli et al. (2020) have also commented on participants feeling frustrated by the death of their parent/s and the situation they found themselves in, where at time having been ill-treated or abandoned by their extended family; which was the case with Participant C.

In the extracts below, Participants D and E share a different experience where they could not even rely on their immediate family members, being their older siblings (brothers) as they were the ones causing problems within the youth-headed family:

> Participant D: *"It also happened that my brother decided to try and sell our home whilst I was renting and the street committee came to fetch me and asked me to come back home before he could sell the house. We got the title deed of the house that he had already given to his friend for safekeeping, and to keeping it away from us. I handed it over to the elders and I moved back to the house. He then came back home and started his shenanigans all over again, so we had to divide the house. Now we split the four-room house into two rooms each, so each of us keep to their half (getting emotional)"*
>
> Participant E: "*For me it was my decision to stay with them (siblings)... maybe what I can blame is my older brother who didn't step up at the time, because what he needed to do was take the money that was still coming into my mother's account and use that money to buy us food and take us through school only you see. That would have really made a difference because the money would not have been coming out of his own pocket*."

A study by Mukashema (2014) indicated that resources like for example property, land or money that was left behind by deceased parents, often caused major conflicts and disagreements within youth-headed households; and reflections by participant in this study seem to echo this notion. Participant D's reflections highlight the role that some of their family members (elders) played in guiding and supporting them when they experienced difficulties with their older brother. Participant E's reflections highlight how she had expected her

brother to be the one heading and supporting the family, instead he let them down and they could not rely on them. In his theory, Bronfenbrenner discusses the importance of having present and supportive relatives, neighbours or friends making a contribution in a child's or individual's immediate setting as this will have a positive influence on that individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He further shares a metaphor stating:

> If such third parties play a disruptive rather than a supportive role, the development process, considered as a system, breaks down: like a three-legged stool, it is more easily upset if one leg is broken or shorter than the others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 5).

Looking at the experiences reflected by participants in this study, it is evident that there has been a major disruption and breakdown in participants familial systems that has caused them to feel unsupported and exposed to dealing with life challenges, either on their own (because at times there are conflicts between the siblings), or relying on a different external support system, like friends and neighbours. The reflections shared in this theme, seem to expose some of the gaps left by extended families who would have usually taken these children in, and have instead supported the notion shared by Van Dijk and Van Driel (2009) that child and youth-headed households are becoming a "new coping mechanism of the extended family" (p. 916). This notion, as highlighted in the literature review (chapter 2), has contributed to the increase of child and youth-headed households in communities due to high levels of unemployment and poverty, therefore, families are no longer able to accommodate and care for orphaned children due to limited resources. Therefore, a breakdown in this macrosystem that was able to alleviate? strain for children when their parents died or were absent, affected not only the children and young people, but communities as a whole as they can no longer rely on this support structure and are forced to find other ways of coping.

Overall, this theme explored participants views and reflections in relation to how they understand the concept of family and the support or lack of support they received from their families after taking on the role of being the head. Participants' views highlighted that family was not only limited to blood relatives but included other members within their communities that have been supportive. Some participants also reported feeling

unsupported by their extended families following the loss of their parents and feeling like a burden. while other participants shared a breakdown within their sibling unit as there would be conflicts regarding resources left behind by their parents.

4.3.4. Abuse Experienced

This theme will be discussing the various forms of abuse and trauma experienced by participants while living in their youth headed-households. Similar studies conducted in Africa reported that individuals from child and youth headed households are usually at risk of experiencing abuse by neighbours/community members and/or their families/relatives, especially those living in informal settlements as their living conditions increase the level of vulnerability and ease of access by abusers (Dlungwana & Sathiparsad, 2008; Tsheko, 2007).

Most participants in this study reported having experienced or witnessed various forms of abuse within their households and some participants reflected on the implications of the abuse. The abuse included neglect, emotional, verbal, physical and sexual harassment.

In the extract below, Participant B shares his experience:

> Participant B: "*He (uncle) started drinking and whenever he starts drinking, he becomes a problem. So, when he was starting to get drunk, he started name calling my cousins and swearing. Later, I heard a loud bang like something was breaking, when I checked I noticed that he was bashing the television screen and breaking it because the other two were watching. He hit it 4 times using a hammer and took it and threw it on the floor and started swearing at us, saying he is going to kill us because we hid the house's title deed".*

Participant B's reflection highlights that he and his siblings have witnessed and experienced some form of verbal (threats of killing) and emotional abuse from their uncle, including the uncle vandalising their property.

In the extracts below, Participants A and E also share their experiences:

> Participant A: *"Staying with a stepmother as well wasn't nice, like when we stayed with her, she stayed in the other shack and would cook food for just her and my father and not give us anything and we would come back from school and not have anything to eat. I was still at school in Spruit but she*

(stepmother) wouldn't even give me money for transport and I would have to walk to school as far as it was whether it was cold, hot or raining it wouldn't matter".

Participant E: "*My brother who was staying with us would only dish up for his sister and his brother's kids but not me. Then our younger sister would leave some food for me when they dished up for her, so we could share, but my brother's child (the one who was dishing up) would see her giving me food and go tell him, so, then my sister would end up getting beaten by him for giving me food. *started getting emotional*. There was a time he beat my sister so badly that she was really hurt*".

Both Participants A and E's reflections indicate that they have experienced some form of neglect from their caregivers, such as being deprived of basic needs (food, money for transport to school). Furthermore, Participant E shared witnessing physical abuse exhibited by her brother towards her sister when she was trying to help her. Foster (2000) indicated that it was common for orphaned children to experience abuse, neglect or mistreatment from members of their extended families and even when they experience the abuse, some would continue to stay as they would have no one to turn to (Foster, 2000; Dlungwana, 2007; Ntuli et al., 2020). The reflections by Participant A and B echo these findings and take it further in that for most of the participants in this study, the abuse they experienced was exhibited by their immediate family/siblings and is not limited to just extended family.

In the extract below, Participant D also shares her experience where her brother was abusive towards her, her baby and the younger siblings:

Participant D: "*The kids were even taken away (by other family) because it was too much for us as he (brother) was abusive to me and treating me like his wife, asking me questions like why I hadn't cooked or did anything for him. Even when he came home at night, he would wake us up at night with the kids and disrupt our sleep to ask abusive questions as if I was his maid. It became too much for me to handle, even when I was still breastfeeding my child, I would sometimes sleep with only my lower body covered so I can breastfeed the child when I needed to, and he would just barge in and pull the blankets off the bed before I could even get dressed or cover myself, and throw us out of the house. The child and I would stay outside the house, hungry and with no place to go and wet nappies (getting very emotional*

and crying). The baby was even admitted to hospital (at 5 months) because he had beaten her and that was just too much for me to bear and that is when I decided to leave."

Participant D experienced various forms of abuse which include verbal, emotional, sexual harassment, neglect and witnessing her child being physically abused by her brother. Her emotional reflection suggests that the abuse caused her significant distress as she reports that it became too much for her to handle. Furthermore, as a result of the abuse, Participant D shares how the abuse still impacts her below:

Participant D: *"My brother (was abusive) did kill me spiritually but by doing that he also toughened me and taught me hard lessons about life. We were fighting (with brother) recently and I decided to fight back because I have putting up with his physical abuse for too long. That has led to me reacting hastily and violently if a guy ticks me off without thinking twice, even with the small things. My approach is to hurt them before they hurt me, so I do not forgive easily. I have to take my time to forgive a person."*

In the extract above, Participant D's reflection implies that the abuse she experienced at the hands of her brother has impacted her negatively in different spheres of her life and how she relates to male figures. Interestingly, Participant D believes that having experienced that form of abuse has resulted in her becoming tougher by being pre-emptively aggressive in relationships. Ntuli et al. (2020) indicated that in comparison to younger siblings living in these households, it is often the heads of the households that experience increased levels of psychological, emotional and psychosocial distress and trauma due to the abuse they either witness and/or experience as they often do not have the protection of caring adults, which support the reflections shared by participants in this study.

Overall, this theme reported on participants' experiences with various forms of abuse, including neglect, emotional, verbal, physical and sexual harassment. Although only one participant was able to articulate the negative implications that the abuse has had and continues to have in her life, reflections from participants in this study could also provide some insight into the unspoken emotional and psychological trauma or implications endured by the heads of these families. Hye-Young (2009) stated that being looked after by family members does not guarantee that children are being well treated and furthermore, when children are taken in by relatives because of the family obligation rather than genuine affection, the children are in a greater danger of being mistreated or abused by their carers than otherwise (p. 88).

Findings in this theme support Hye-Young's (2009) observations and perhaps has further shed light onto the abuse that these young people experience even at the hands of their immediate family members/siblings, rather than the community or extended family members. Unfortunately for the participants in this study, it is their immediate system that causes them distress rather than offering protection.

4.3.5. Resilience

This theme will be focusing on participant's sense of resilience with the different challenges they have had to endure while living in their youth headed families and caring for their siblings. Resilience has been defined or explained as having the ability to withstand, recover or finding ways to positively adapt when one is faced with significant life challenges within a given context (Bonanno, 2004; Masten, 2001; Walsh, 2012). During interviews for this study, participants also reflected on how they have been able to or try to survive, sharing how their experiences have shaped their approach to life and challenging circumstances, which will be discussed below.

In the extracts below Participants A, C and D share their reflections:

> Participant A: "*I realised that not talking and closing myself in the house when I have nothing wouldn't help me but we will end up struggling more, so that wouldn't help… I think there are others who have maybe been through worse than what we had experienced, like for example we still at least go to bed having eaten and some people don't even have food."*
>
> Participant C: "*My friend, he would tell me not to focus or worry and feel like I don't have anything. So, he would tell me things like "what you have, you have and what you don't have, you don't have, so don't worry about what people say or how that one dresses. We would just have those conversations as if we were adults and that helped me."*
>
> Participant D: *"Woman that raised me, taught me the principle that whether there is food or not and however dire the situation at home can be, I have to love my family unconditionally and we have to always look after each other and protect them. My mom taught me to be thankful and that it doesn't matter how fancy or not the food was, because the stomach is not transparent and no one will see what*

you had for supper, even if you only had pap and water for supper, be grateful and look forward to the future."

It appears as though Participant A and C's reflections indicate that it was important for them to understand that at times they need to reach out to others for help and not focus on what other people would think of them. Furthermore, the participant's reflections suggest that they have developed some form of mental reasoning that allows them to be grateful for the little they have as it ensures they survive, while also being able to accept when they have nothing, as they believe there are other people in even worse off situations. Participant D also reflects on the role her mother and other woman in her life have played in teaching her to be thankful for the things they have but also to remain hopeful for the future in difficult time. Wright and Bell (2009) commented on how family belief systems had great influence on how individuals in that family viewed adversities and the aim would mainly be to facilitate a positive and hopeful outlook on life, regardless of the challenges they faced. Walsh (2012) also commented on the idea of hope when people and families are faced with adversity, stating that "hope is essential to the spirit: it fuels energy and efforts to rise above adversity. Hope is based on faith:

"No matter how bleak the present, a better future can be envisioned" (p. 408); which is an idea that perhaps participants or individuals living in these households hold on to.

In the extracts below, Participants A, B, C and D share their experiences:

Participant A: *It's just that I have learnt to move on from it and I don't even think about it anymore (challenges) and things have gotten better, so it's when I am talking about it then I will get emotional but for me it's all in the past now."*

Participant B: *"Such is life and it's about just surviving… I also started adopting that way of thinking of surviving with what we have and not go around asking, and I felt whoever wanted to give us something will give it to us, if not it was okay."*

Participant C: *"It's like... how can I put this... my brother and my mother actually survived by hustling and I use to observe that, so I told myself I couldn't struggle and was raised by hustlers so that is what I did."*

Participant D: *"If my mother wasn't strict when raising us, I wasn't going to build the strength and resilience to do this, she played a role of both the mother and father. So, the hardship she raised us under shaped me to me this strong."*

The above reflections seem to capture how participants' have developed resilience over time with regards to the challenges that come with heading a youth only household. Participant A's way of coping is through trying to avoid or forget some of her experiences and challenges, however, her reflection suggests that she has not forgotten as she reported that she gets emotional when talking about it. Participants B and C learnt to rely on themselves as a way of surviving some of the challenges they experience, while Participant D believes that the discipline her mother instilled and the challenges she has faced, helped strengthen her and build a sense of resilience. Furthermore, Participant D shares a reflection below that she believes has strengthened her:

Participant D: "*There were support groups, last I went they were talking to the group of people that are abused. I realised that my brother was not killing me, but strengthening me in a way, He gave me a glimpse of how difficult life can be. Yes, he did kill me spiritually, as I would often sit and cry. I would sleep with a bible under my pillow, reading verses at night and pray*."

In her reflection, Participant D shares a painful account of having been abused by her brother and how the experience scarred her spiritually and perhaps even emotionally, however, she also believes this experience strengthened her. Participant D's reflections may highlight how even though being resilient can be positive in helping one survive their challenges, it still does not take away the experience itself and the emotional or psychological scaring that occurred. Findings from a similar study reported how individuals from these households would often use negative coping strategies like repressing emotions or isolating themselves in order to avoid dealing with some of the emotional scarring, and refer to this behaviour as being resilient (Ntuli et al., 2020).

Overall, this theme focused on reporting participants' reflections in relation to their experiences that have resulted in them learning different ways of coping in order to survive. Some of the ways included asking for help when needed, having to rely on themselves at time and learning to accept their lifestyle and trying to grateful for the little they may have. Other reflections also highlighted the need to survive and having strength to overcome their challenges and perhaps sometimes relying on what you they have learnt from either mothers

or friends regarding surviving and being hopeful for the future. Findings from this theme highlighted how coping strategies or one's sense of resilience may vary for each participant (Dalen et al., 2009; MacIntyre, 1999;) based on their experiences and perhaps the teaching and learning they received from their environments while growing up, while also adapting to their roles as head of their youth-headed households.

4.3.6. Living in Poverty and needing support

This theme will be discussing participant's socioeconomic challenges due to the high state of poverty and unemployment within their households and the various ways they have tried to provide for themselves and their siblings. This theme will also discuss the kind of support participants received from their community and its members and the NGO, while also sharing the challenges or lack of support from government systems.

4.3.6.1. Poverty/unemployment

Participants reflected and reported on the ways in which they have struggled to meet basic needs at home and sometimes even having to seek employment or reaching out to the community in order to get help.

In the extracts below, Participants A, B, and D share their experiences:

> Participant A: "*I started cleaning for my neighbour to get money and would use that to buy myself school uniform"*
>
> Participant B: *"It was difficult because my grandmother used to sell things like peanuts and corn by the hospital next to the shopping centre. Even though it wouldn't always take us through the entire month but for those few weeks it would make some difference because we could buy food, pay for water and electricity and whatever was left we would see how we could use it."*
>
> Participant C: *"So, I started producing beats at a young age and I started hustling by selling beats and would use that money to take care of myself and my brother, when I could."*
>
> Participant D: *"I grew up in a house so poverty stricken that if there was food, my mom would tell us to eat as much as we want until we are satisfied, but to also know that when there is no food, there is nothing that can be done about it."*

The aforementioned highlights the poverty that the participants and their families have endured, and perhaps still continue to experience, as some participants reported not having enough food and money to last the month or pay for basic utilities Participant D's reflections show a sense of helplessness that her family experienced

and how having a meal or food in the house would been seen as a privilege. Participant A, Participant B and participant C's reflections indicate the different ways that either the participants or their caregiver tried to make money in order to sustain themselves and their families.

In the extract below, Participant D shares the difficulty in raising her siblings while not having money:

> Participant D: "*We would have money issues. They would want money to go buy clothes and I just couldn't give them because I did not have any money. I would tell them if we have something, be grateful, if not, there is not much we can do. So, I didn't deny them because I didn't want to buy them clothes. I would rather buy clothes for them than for myself and I would consider myself last*."

Participant D's reflection highlight how at times she would need to make sacrifices in order to ensure that her siblings are cared for, while also trying to teach her siblings to be grateful for the things they do have. The experiences and reflections shared by participants in this study seem to align with finding from similar studies, reporting that young people from youth-headed households were often found to be extremely vulnerable and deprived due to living in sheer poverty (Ntuli et al., 2020); and furthermore, unemployment is a major issue affecting most South Africans, particularly young black people (Mayer, 2011; Ndaleni, 2012).

While poverty influenced the microsystem, its impact is seen across the chronosystem. In South Africa, due to the pervious apartheid policies, instituted in the macrosystem, poverty in black communities is generational and has continued to cause strain in households, as seen by reflections shared. Participants in this study have therefore found ways to try and adapt or manage their situations and finding other ways to make money since they are unemployed.

4.3.6.2. Systemic support and it's failures

According to Richter (2010) neighbours, community groups/organisations and faith-based groups are usually the main source of contact for destitute families. While participants from Richter's (2010) study reported not receiving such support, participants in this research study reflected on the role and support they received from their community members (friends, neighbours and teachers) and an NGO; who seem to have played a bigger role in helping them sustain their households more than some of their extended family.

In the extracts below, Participants A, C and D share their experiences:

Participant A: "*If we had nothing we would go to neighbours and ask for food" …* "*in grade 7, I started realising that sometimes we don't even have food for me and my siblings and I told my teacher and my teacher was the one who referred me to XX. Currently however, we are all unemployed".*

Participant C: "*My high school friend introduced me to his aunt and they started helping me by bringing me food and sometimes buying me clothes."*

Participant D: *"There is this girl who is a neighbour of mine that I practically take as my sister, whenever I struggled, she would be there for me and give me the support that I needed. Even when electricity would run out, I would go to Linda (her) and she would always give good advice."*

The above reflections highlight the important role that the neighbours, teachers and friends played in helping them providing support and helping participants sustain their households, and for Participant A, her teacher connecting them to the NGO in the community.

This finding was also supported by Evans (2012) who indicated that young people from these kinds of households often developed supportive relationships with members of their community (neighbours, friends or teachers), sometimes with members of other communities that were willing to assist them and help them secure basic household resources.

Participants further reported on the assistance they received from a community NGO as they would offer them food parcels and sometimes send caregivers to go check in on the families:

Participant A: *"It started getting better when we started getting help from social workers from XX and receiving food parcels, but we actually had to hide the food we were getting in big empty containers from my father because we were afraid it would be a big problem as he would complain or ask where we got it from. We even told the caregivers who came to check on us that they should not say where they were from or why they were coming, so they would pretend to just be friends so he wouldn't find out."*

Participant E: "*We do receive food parcels and also did have a caregiver from XX coming to check in on us but the time we didn't know much about the idea of caregivers and what they really do. So, you would find that whenever she did come and start asking questions, we would answer in a defensive way because we wanted to protect our family."*

The help received from XX was received in various ways by the participants based on their individual circumstances with Participant A noting that, they had to conceal that they were receiving help. This was necessary due to the fear that it would create problems with their father who was not helping them at home. Participant E reflected that the help was received with suspicion and trepidation due to lack of knowledge regarding the role of caregivers. Thus, Participant E experienced difficulty trusting the caregiver and communicating honestly.

Even though there were challenges, participants acknowledged that receiving help from the NGO made some difference. This is supported by findings from a study that noted how young people who were part of child welfare were grateful for the food parcels and sometimes clothes they would receive when they had nothing (Ndaleni, 2012). As Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) has indicated how the ecological environment has different layers that are interlinked and consistently interact with each other, the reflections by participants in this study indicate how they were able to interact with various systems in their environment in order to get assistance. The above reflections highlight the importance of having a reliable foundation within the macrosystem, where institutions and organisations within the communities are equipped with providing appropriate aid for individuals and ensuring that even though they may experience strain in their immediate environments, they are still able to rely on other surrounding systems for assistance. Participants C also reported that he started receiving food parcels from the NGO after he stopped receiving his grant pay-out due to age:

> Participant C: *"The support I got was from the grant money I received from the government until I was 17 years old, then from then onwards till now it has been the XX helping me mainly with food parcels."*

In the findings of the study, it was only Participant C who reported receiving some government relief as he received his child grant, however, other participants reported difficulties when dealing with the South African government systems that were meant to offer support:

> Participant A: *"Well, we didn't get grant money because there was an issue with our mother's death certificate. Basically, my mother's identity was stolen and someone "woke her from the dead" on the system in 2009. So, because our father wasn't really present, we couldn't really get things done and only found out when I was turning 18 and needing to our ID documents."*

Participant E: *"I couldn't register for grant money because my brother had taken all the certificates since he was the oldest. Then at school I told one of my teachers about our situation at home and she gave me money to go and reprint my mother's death certificate, so we can at least be able to apply for grant and that helped make the situation a bit better after that. We didn't have a social worker coming to check or help us, so there were a lot if gaps."*

Participant A and E's reflections suggest that they felt let down by the various governmental systems as both participants reported having challenges with regards to documents that would have aided in them getting the social grant (e.g., mother's death certificate, Identity Document). The lack of efficient relief systems in either communities or the country unfortunately continue to cause strain and perpetuate the increase and cycle of poverty within such households. Maqoko (2007) indicates that "South African citizens are obliged to register for citizenship under the provisions of the Registration Act, in order to gain access to available state resources" (p. 725). Furthermore, Sloth-Nielson (2004) also affirms that it is a child's constitutional right and mandate to be registered and receive identity documents that will later allow them to gain access to resources made available by the government. However, similar to participants in this study, participants in Sloth-Nielson's study also reported having difficulty either obtaining their birth certificates or identity documents (Sloth-Nielson, 2004), and unfortunately this infringement results in young people from these households not being able to get jobs or assistance from the government when they need it the most. The systems that would make it possible for young people to access the necessary documents, get jobs and assistance are located within the macrosystem. However, as alluded to by the participants' reflections, these systems are not supportive of, thus hindering on their ability to have access to resources that can help better their livelihoods.

Overall, this theme focused on participants' reported experiences in relation to their challenges with poverty. Participants reported either having to start looking for employment at an early age or receiving support from various community members, (NGO) and child social grant. However, some participants reflected on the challenges they faced with regards to failure in government systems, resulting in them not obtaining the required documents that would have assisted them in receiving the social grant or finding appropriate employment.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter explored the results and interpreted the findings of this research study in relation to literature and the ecological systems theory. A brief background table of the participants was listed and the various themes that emerged following the analysis of the collected data was discussed, relating to the earlier noted research questions and research aims (chapter one). Six main themes with eight subthemes emerged, highlighting the various experiences shared by participants in this study. Various quotes shared by participants were included in relation to the themes, and these quotations assisted in providing rich details of the participant's experiences and highlighting the pattern or connection between participant's reflections under the relevant themes. A summary of the findings, limitation and recommendations from the research study will be shared in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary of findings

This research study and report was focused on exploring and understanding how individuals who are living in and heading youth-headed households experience their roles as head of the household/family and responsibilities of caring for their siblings. Furthermore, this study aimed to understand some of the challenges that are experienced in these youth-headed families and what support they received from their social settings. The sample of this study consisted of five youth participants, with ages ranging between 19 – 35 years old, who were heading their households, and were part of an NGO in the Katlehong Township, Gauteng. This research study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and followed a qualitative research approach. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant and the data collected was analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Six themes emerged from the findings, namely: Loss: circumstances leading to youth-headed household; Parentified Child; Family; Abuse Experienced; Resilience; and Living in Poverty and Needing Support; and together with the sub-themes, were discussed in detail in chapter 4, however, a brief outline is presented below.

Reflections shared by participants in this study highlighted how they experienced their roles as heads of their households/families, indicating the responsibilities they assumed and challenges they experienced while caring for their siblings. All participants reflected on the losses they encountered which included the death of parents and a grandmother. As part of the losses they experienced, participants also reflected on the absence of some of the parents, with most participants reporting on the absence of their fathers and one participant reporting the absence of his mother. Participants in the study also reported having felt abandoned by their extended family members, who were not always available or supportive to them after the loss of their parents/caregiver. The losses experienced by participants led to them having to take on the responsibility of being the heads of their households and families. Therefore, participants reflected on how taking on the role of heading their families and being the 'parent' to their siblings meant they had to be responsible and find ways of caring for their siblings with limited resources as most of them were unemployed, yet still needed to ensure that their siblings

had food and clothes. Furthermore, participants shared some of the sacrifices they have had to make, like dropping out of school in order to find part-time jobs and make money or having to adjust their social lives in order to accommodate their new roles. Participants indicated feeling overwhelmed at times by their responsibilities, with some participants feeling as though they did not have 'normal' lives like other children and families and feeling as though they had to grow up quickly, thus losing that sense of childhood.

The concept of family and what that meant to each of them was also discussed and some participants reflected that for them, family was not only limited to the people they shared the same bloodline with. For them, family consisted of members of the community like neighbours and friends, as those people were more supportive than actual extended family members and often assisting them in their time of need. Other participants indicated that importance of being unified and caring for each other as siblings even when they do not have parents as they are still family. However, some participants shared the challenges they encountered with some of their older siblings where there would be conflicts relating to the family home or money that was left behind by their parents. Most participants reported having not felt supported by their extended family members and reflected that it was difficult for them to seek help as they often felt like a burden whenever they reached out and felt rejected.

Participants also shared different experiences of abuse they encountered, including neglect, emotional, verbal, physical and sexual harassment. One participant shared having been emotionally abused and sexually harassed by her older brother. Another participant shared how her brother would hide food from her and only shared it with his child and would beat the child up if she shared the food with others; another participant reflected on how their father was alive but neglected them and only shared food and his money with their stepmother, while another participant shared that his uncle would be violent when drunk and come to their home to vandalise the property as he wanted it for himself. Participants however, also shared how even though they had experienced various hardships, there were still parts of them that were resilient and focused on surviving and finding ways to cope with the challenges in order to survive for their families.

Participants in this study also reflected on the sense of poverty that is experienced in their households especially due to high unemployment rates in the area. Participants shared how they have had to rely on the help of their community members, like teachers who assisted in putting them in contact with the NGOs in order

for them to receive food parcels. Some participants indicated that the social grant money would help them, however, not all children in the households would get the money as some did not have birth certificates and struggled with home affairs. The experiences shared by participants further highlighted some of the failure by the South African government social systems, as some participants did not have their Identity Documents (ID's) or could not get access to the social grant.

Participants in this study also indicated how the NGO in Katlehong helped them not only with food, but also allocating some care workers to check in on the families from time to time and offer them support. The reflections shared by these participants have been very valuable for this study, as by openly sharing their experiences, they have managed to provide a lens into the lives and experiences of individuals who are heading youth-headed households, and this information will further contribute more knowledge regarding the phenomenon of child and youth-headed households and families.

5.2. Limitations of the study

Even though there were significant findings that were explored in this research study, there were some limitations that were identified. As this was a qualitative study, and that data having been collected from small sample of five people residing in the same area, the results gathered cannot be generalised and applied to a larger population of individuals from youth-headed households in South Africa. Finding participants to participate in this research study was quite challenging. The researcher experienced some difficulties with some of the gate keepers in communities or organisations as they would either would not respond to requests or agree to assist and later go silent and ignore any follow-up requests. It was also difficult to find participants without the help of an organisation, until the NGO from Katlehong responded to the request and assisted with ways to find willing participants.

Finding literature regarding similar research studies that were conducted in township settings was extremely limited as most studies conducted on this topic focuses on rural areas or other African countries. Even with some of the literature that exists, it mostly focuses on the impact of HIV and AIDS epidemic on African countries and families, with limited studies that focus on other causes of youth-headed households. Some of the studies that have been conducted often seem to focus on the younger children in these households, and only a few have focused on the older individuals heading these households. Furthermore, in relation to South Africa's

reports or policies regarding social development such as the white paper on families, national youth reports, government gazette: green paper, limited information is reported on child and youth-headed households or families, with most focus being on single or female-headed households. Therefore, the researcher had to rely on other sources for guidance, as this information was not readily available, especially on the social development website.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on some of the literature and findings of this research study, the following are some recommendations that may help with future research studies on the topic. Individuals from child and youth-headed households are in need of consistent support, especially with managing some of the challenges they experience including dealing with the loss of parents.

Perhaps the government's Department of Social Development could make arrangements with organisations (e.g., churches) or NGOs in communities, and other organisations/institutions that provide counselling services to assist individuals from these households. Therefore, NGO's and other institutions can provide the space needed for counselling sessions (can also be group session) while the organisations with counsellors can offer their services, and get compensation or funding from the Department of Social Development.

Findings in this research study also exposed some of the failures in governmental systems and process that are meant to help individuals, like the home affairs and social grant or social welfare. Therefore, more efficient support from these systems is required to assist individuals coming from child/youth-headed households, and helping them access social grants or the relevant documents that are needed to receive assistance; and access to social workers. Another recommendation is that the Department of Education could also assist by providing tailored training for teachers in schools, in order to equip them with the appropriate skills which can help them identify children who are in need and come from child or youth-headed households. This will be helpful as some of the children do attend school and if more teachers are willing to appropriately assist these children, they may get help quicker.

The Department of Social Development of South Africa plays a major role in having to provide aid to individuals/families/households (public) with regards to social welfare services and protection where needed, including child and youth-headed households. This department has a public online website where different

people or organisations/institutions can access information, documents or policies, relating to various developments or contributions that the department is making in the country and for the people. Therefore, in light of the limitation mentioned in the previous section, and lack of readily updated information on youth-headed households; it will be helpful for the Department of Social Development of South Africa to ensure that the documents/policies (including information on child and youth-headed households) that are accessible to the public on their website is actively maintained. Having readily updated information will assist future researchers to gain access to accurate and relevant information. Furthermore, findings in this study highlighted the role that organisations/NGO's play in providing assistance to individuals from youth-headed households. Therefore, having readily updated information available on the website (allowing easy access) can help shine the light on the existence and challenges these households have and assistance they continue to need, thus encouraging more organisations to assist.

Lastly, based on the findings in this study, future research focusing on the understanding the views and experiences of extended family members in relation to having to care and support children from their families who have been orphaned or live in a child/youth-headed household.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule Guide

Psychology School of Human & Community Development University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559

Demographic Information

- Age of participant
- School (if not found at the university)
- Grade or level of study
- Number of people living in the household – Their ages, **sex.** nature of their familial relationship with you (i.e. sibling, cousin, neighbour etc.), and schooling information

Family Background, Experience and Challenges of Heading a Household

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself? *(thinking of using this as an introductory question to build some rapport and get some insight into how they see themselves, will also link this question to demographics maybe…)*

2. When did you assume full parental responsibilities for your siblings and what were the reasons for it*? (At what age, number of years now. They 'why' will help clarify reason so as not to assume death because some parents do just abandon the children, therefore, it is better for them to tell the story)*

3. What encouraged you to assume the parental responsibility for your siblings? *(This might give indication as to whether there were any other family members that could have helped but didn't or possible separation)*

4. Do you have children of your own and how has that impacted your life and your family as the head? (you can also enquire about the paternity of her own children)

5. How did you feel when you took on the responsibility to take care of your siblings and the household? *(choice or obligation and giving up their own childhood)*

6. How do you define the term "Family" *(will also ask them to draw a KFD, maybe I could do this before we start the interview, so I can probe using that)?*

7. What does it feel like to be a member of a child only family or household?

8. What are the roles and responsibilities that each sibling plays in the household?

9. Tell me about the relationship you have with your siblings? *(this could help highlight some difficulties they might have with each other)*

10. How has your life changed or being affected by assuming responsibility of being the head of the household? *(will ask them to maybe elaborate on how their life was before assuming this role) Ask about how it has influenced the past and anticipated future?*

11. What are some of the challenges you experience in raising your siblings and looking after your household?

Support Structure

12 What support have you received from relatives if there are any?

13.What support have you received from either the government (Social worker) or the community since you assumed responsibility of your household?

14.What has helped you to cope with the responsibilities involved with being the head of the household?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet – XX

Psychology School of Human & Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 11-717-4500/2/3/4. Fax: +27-11717-4559

Dear Potential Participant,

Hello. My name is Sibongile Molemane. I am currently a Clinical Psychology Master's student at the University of the Witwatersrand and I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining this degree. The purpose of my research is to gain understanding on the experiences of youth heading child only households and to explore how they construct their family identity as a child only family unit.

I would therefore like to invite you to participate in this study. Please note that you would need to satisfy the following inclusion criteria to participate in the study:

- Have or currently heading a Youth-Headed Household

Participation in this study will involve being interviewed by me and the interview should take approximately 1 hour. Participation is voluntary, and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to go through with the interview. Everything you say during this interview will be kept confidential. The interview will be audio-recorded and the recordings and hard copies of the transcripts will be kept safely at the university in a locked cabinet, accessed only by myself and my supervisor and soft copies will be kept on my password protected external hard drive. This is primarily because we will possibly publish the findings of the study. Although I know who you are, confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by not disclosing any information that is of a personal nature in the report. Your identity will also not be disclosed to my supervisor. I

will assign a pseudonym to your information in the report, for example, Participant A or Respondent B. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time before the report is submitted for marking and/or publishing. You also have the right to refrain from answering any question should you wish not to do so.

If you feel distressed upon completion of the interview, you may contact Mrs Mamolefe Mokhele the head social worker at the XX, who offer you free counselling and support. His contact details are as follows:

- Mrs Mamolefe Mokhele – Head Social Worker at XX
- Tel: 011 905 0915

A copy of the research study and its findings will be provided to you upon request following the conclusion of the research. You may e-mail or phone to request this. Our contact details appear in the signature below. Feedback will be available on successful examination of the study.

Before we begin with the research interview, I will need you to read through and sign two consent forms, one for confirming that you are giving me permission to participate in the research and the other giving me permission to record our interview sessions. I will contact you within two working days from receiving your confirmation of participation in order to discuss your involvement in the research.

Kind Regards

_____ _____

Sibongile Molemane

Cell: 081 342 5857

Email: 686489@students.wits.ac.za

Renate Gericke (supervisor)

Tel: 011 717- 4555

Email: renate.gericke@wits.ac.za

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

Psychology School of Human & Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 11-717-4500/2/3/4. Fax: +27-11-717-4559

I, _____, consent to be interviewed by Sibongile Petronella Molemane for her research study on understanding the experiences of youth who are heading or have headed a child/youth-only household in South Africa and I understand:

- the nature and purpose of this study;
- that participation in this interview is voluntary;
- that I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to;
- that I may withdraw from the study at any time;
- that no negative consequences will arise if I decide to withdraw or if I decline participation;
- that no identifying information will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential;
- that direct quotes may be used in the published work based on this research; however, no identifying information will be used so as to protect my identity;
- If I am quoted, a pseudonym (Participant A, Participant B etc.) will be used
- that there are no direct benefits to participating in this study;
- that there are no known risks associated with this study;

- I am aware that the results of the study will be reported in the form of a research report for the partial completion of the degree, MA in Clinical Psychology;
- the research may also be presented at a local/international conference and published in a journal and/or book chapter.

I confirm that I satisfy the research inclusion criteria, as specified in the participant information sheet.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Recoding Consent Form

Psychology School of Human & Community Development

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Telephone: +27 11-717-4500/2/3/4. Fax: +27-11-717-4559

I, _____, consent to my interview with Sibongile Petronella Molemane for her research study on understanding the experiences of youth who are heading or have headed child/youth-only households in South Africa being audio-recorded, and I understand that:

- access to the audio- recordings will be restricted to the researcher, Sibongile Molemane;
- the audio- recordings will only be processed and transcribed by the researcher, Sibongile Molemane;
- no identifying information will be included in the transcripts or the research report;
- direct quotes may be used in the published work based on this research; however, no identifying information will be used so as to protect my identity, instead a pseudonym (Participant A, Participant B etc.) will be used;
- the audio-recordings will be stored safely in a location with restricted access;

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/18/006 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	The experiences and meaning of family in child-headed households in SA
INVESTIGATORS	Molemane Sibongile
DEPARTMENT	Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	29 May 2018
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 29 May 2018

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Esther Price)

cc Supervisor:

Ms Renate Gericke
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2020

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES