

**PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING  
AND ITS IMPACT ON JUVENILE OFFENDING**

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## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

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The author hereby declares that this whole research report, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is her own original work and that it has not been submitted for any degree at another university.

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## ABSTRACT

Crime committed by youth within South Africa is a problem of growing concern. Family environments are seen as powerful putative factors in the development of offending behaviour. On the basis of family systems theory, it was postulated that juveniles are influenced by the reciprocal interactions amongst family members as it shapes their development. Kohlberg's theory of moral development illustrates that the formation of morals is influenced by the quality of relationships within family units. This study therefore explored juvenile delinquent's perceptions of their families and the impact it had on their offending behaviour. The subjective world of these offenders was focused upon within the qualitative paradigm through an exploration of their experiences. This method was deemed significant as it attempted to understand these delinquents in terms of their own definitions of their family lives in order to provide an in-depth and insightful account into how they perceived their families to have influenced their behaviour. Eleven juvenile offenders, aged between 15 and 21 attending a diversion programme participated in the study. The research was conducted in the form of semi-structured individual interviews where various themes relating to the family were explored. The participants' responses were recorded and analysed utilising thematic content analysis. The participants perceived their families to potentially act as a contributing factor in the development of their criminal behaviour. Specific aspects, namely different family forms, family relationships, patterns and response styles, as well as families levels of emotional involvement were all perceived to have impacted on their delinquent behaviour. Although none of these factors can be considered in isolation, a complex interplay of these family characteristics may significantly contribute to the development of asocial behaviour. In contrast to these findings, areas of contestation also arose from participants' talk. Despite their delinquency and the potential contribution of the family, some participants identified the family to act as a protective factor and thus not influencing their involvement in criminal acts. Aside from the family, other influences such as peer groups and community violence were also identified as potential risk factors for juvenile delinquency. Therefore although an important contributing factor, the family cannot be considered in isolation when attempting to identify what may lead these juveniles to engage in criminal acts.

**Key words:** juvenile, delinquents, family, systems theory, family form, family relationships, family patterns, family response styles, family emotional involvement

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE**

### **1.1 THE IMPACT OF YOUTH CRIME ON SOUTH AFRICA**

Around the world, and on a daily basis in South Africa, newspapers and the media report on violent acts that have been committed – whether it be violence by gangs, in schools or by young people on the streets (Mercy, Butchart, Farrington & Cerdá, 2002). Mkhondo (2005) supports this by highlighting how South Africa is currently in the grip of high levels of crime where recorded instances of violent acts have increased dramatically over the last decade. This increasing rate of criminal behaviour has become a problem of such magnitude that it is now viewed as a public health concern where all citizens are required to take responsibility. Mkhondo (2005) as well as Mercy et al (2002) point out that violence by young people is one of the most visible forms of violence in society. *“Although not an accurate indicator of the extent of crime, prison statistics indicate that at least 43% of the total prison population are 25 years or younger with some 24 669 being under the age of 21”* (DCS Annual Report, 2004 as cited in Mkhondo, 2005, p. 6). Mercy et al (2002) go on to say how this youth violence not only deeply harms the victims, but also their families, friends and communities, with its effects not only being seen in death, illness or disability but also in terms of the quality of life. Offending behaviour involving young people is described by Mercy et al (2002) as contributing greatly to the costs of health and welfare services, reduces productivity, decreases the value of property, disrupts a range of essential services and generally undermines the fabric of society. This points to the important need to understand the extent to which young South Africans are at risk of becoming involved in crime, and the factors that lead them to this path, with a view to intervening before the criminal life path becomes well-established.

### **1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR**

With criminal activity occurring everyday in all corners of the world, and the increasing number of juveniles engaging in such activities, Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) indicate how society has struggled to understand the causation of these activities and as a result, the steps necessary to prevent them from occurring. Dahlberg and Krug (2002) go on to state that no single factor explains why some individuals behave violently toward others or why

violence is more prevalent amongst certain individuals and not others. Violence, according to Contos Shoaf (2002) as well as Dahlberg and Krug (2002), is the result of a complex interplay of individual, biological, relationship, psychological, social, cultural and environmental factors and therefore understanding how these factors are related to delinquency is one of the important steps in the public health approach to preventing violence amongst these youth.

### **1.3 THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF JUVENILE OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR**

When looking at this multifarious interplay of factors that can all contribute to the development of offending behaviour, the family environment and parental behaviour is described by Mercy et al (2002) as being a central factor that can lead to the development of violent behaviour in young people, and hence the focus of this study. The family, as highlighted by Mercy et al (2002), impacts on an individual at a relationship level as well as from a psychological, social, cultural and environmental perspective, thus indicating the vast influence that the family may have over the development of a child. Even individual risk factors that can lead to the onset of juvenile violence do not exist in isolation, where interpersonal relationships amongst family and friends have a strong effect in influencing the development of aggressive and violent behaviour and shape personality traits that, in turn, can contribute to delinquent and offending behaviour (Mercy et al, 2002). During adolescence, Mercy et al (2002) describe how friends and peers can act as contributing factors in the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour, but despite this, the influence of the family is usually the greatest risk factor that can lead to the participation in criminal activity. This is supported by Regoli and Hewitt (1994), who state that the first social unit that one comes into contact with is the family.

Furthermore, Regoli and Hewitt (1994) point out how the family socialises children throughout the life cycle, providing an environment in which ones personality is formed, where one should experience physical protection and emotional support, and where children learn from the adults in this family. *“The family is one of the most sacred social institutions, and is where people derive their personal identities”* (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994, p. 226). With this in mind, Regoli and Hewitt (1994) indicate how families can transmit

values that promote violence and undermine the development of positive self-concepts amongst its members and hence, the family could actually form a breeding ground in the development of delinquent offending behaviour.

#### **1.4 RATIONALE: THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSING ON THE FAMILY AS AN INFLUENTIAL FACTOR**

Most of the literature pertaining to the influence of the family in the development of criminal behaviour focuses on the quantitative establishment of etiological and causative factors. Very little research has attempted an in-depth, qualitative investigation of how the juvenile delinquent perceives and experiences their family to be an influencing factor that led to the development of their criminal behaviour (Mkhondo, 2005). This is reinforced by Dissel (1999b) and Bischof, Stith and Wilson (1992) who state that it is an age-group where little attention has been given to the perspectives of delinquents who have been convicted of a crime and that understanding their perspective can be helpful in joining and creating strategies that fit with their world view and an essential area that requires further exploration.

Simons, Gordon Simons, Burt, Brody and Cutrona (2005) as well as Mkhondo (2005) go on to demonstrate how most community research and studies limit juvenile delinquents' family-level variables to household or socioeconomic income factors which examine the extent of how community disadvantage indirectly increases an individual's risk for delinquency through fostering family stress and disrupting parental practices. These studies have generated weak support and according to Simons et al (2005) fail to include comprehensive features of the family such as parental quality of interactions and attachment the child has with the caregiver, their socialisation, the discipline that the child is subjected to or the developmental climate that promotes pro-social behaviour. Research that incorporates these aspects may be beneficial for a number of reasons and an extended rationale for this is referred to below.

Palmary and Moat (2002) as well as Mercy et al (2002) indicate how the problem of youth becoming involved in committing crimes cannot be viewed in isolation from other problem behaviours. These delinquents who are perpetrators of violence tend to commit a range of

criminal activities and often display other problems, such as truancy and dropping out of school, bullying, attempted suicide, substance abuse, compulsive lying, hostility, reckless driving and unprotected sex which increases the likelihood of HIV/Aids transmission or the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Palmary & Moat, 2002; Mercy et al, 2002). These are therefore important indicators for identifying at-risk youth who may be targeted for early crime prevention programmes.

Sharpe and Litzelfelner's (2004) approach to understanding juvenile offenders is to focus upon those factors that place an individual at risk for becoming involved in criminal activity – risks or certain agents that function within the individual's environment. Thus, when looking at violence prevention, Stevens, Seedat, Swart and van der Walt (2003) describe how *“more complex understandings of its determinants, antecedents and triggers are required, as intervention directed at this socially and historically embedded phenomenon are more likely to be successful if they are comprehensive, multi-level and guided by theoretical and trans-disciplinary diversity”* (p. 13). Therefore, as highlighted by Mercy et al (2002), understanding the factors that increase the risk of young people being the perpetrators of violence or crime is essential for developing effective policies and programmes to prevent violence. Furthermore, Contos Shoaf (2002) illustrates that the importance of identifying the origin of criminal behaviour lies in the ability to help policymakers, law enforcement, service providers and communities better understand and predict crime and criminal behaviour – by reducing these risk factors, one can attempt to reduce the incidence and severity of juvenile crime. Thus, Leve and Chamberlain (2004) as well as Dissel (1999a) indicate how offenders under the age of 18 are rapidly growing within the South African juvenile population and therefore with this in mind, this research aimed to establish whether the family is seen as a contributing factor in the origin of juvenile antisocial behaviour.

Contos Shoaf (2002) as well as Bischof et al (1992) identify that there are a number of studies that are virtually unanimous in identifying the family domain as a crucial influence in the development of offending behaviour. In addition to this, it has been found by Katsiyannis, Zhang, Barrett and Flaska (2004) and Contos Shoaf (2002) that several family pathology variables, such as family violence and conflict, parental criminality accompanied

by a family history of problem behaviour, family management problems, inconsistent parental attitudes and a lack of affectionate bonding between youth and parents have been implicated as influencing factors that help perpetuate such violence in these juvenile offenders. Therefore, Baker, Tabacoff, Tornusciolo and Eisenstadt (2003) emphasise that juveniles do not suddenly appear one day as fully developed offenders; rather they grow up in family systems that shape their personalities and their course of development over time.

Through establishing whether the family is a risk factor in the development of this behaviour it can be used in order to guide both prevention and intervention efforts. Dissel (1999a) supports this statement by indicating that through understanding these offenders' lives and motivations, it is essential to promote rehabilitation, prevent recidivism, and protect society from a growing wave of delinquent offenders. In support of this, Baker et al (2003) state that a developmental appropriate approach would certainly entail an inclusion of the family and therefore it is indicated how the involvement of family in the treatment of the juvenile delinquent may act as an agent against recidivism if the family factors that may have been associated with the development of the offending behaviour can be removed. *“Since the family environment is a potential risk factor for juvenile offenders, integration of relapse prevention into daily family life may be a significant part of these youths' success or failure in the community”* (Zankman & Bonomo, 2004, p. 139).

Furthermore, Bischof et al (1992) state that although research about juvenile offenders has burgeoned over the last ten years and families are often involved in treatment, little is known about the family systems of these offenders. Thus, finding out whether the family does act as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile offending behaviour will therefore have value in contributing to the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and interventions that are offered amongst these delinquents as well as assist in fostering the early identification of at-risk families (Bischof et al, 1992). This is supported by Paperny and Deisher (1983) who state that for those professionals who aim to treat and care for these youth, it is important to have an understanding of the influencing factors and underlying family dynamics in order for effective treatment to take place.

## **1.5 THE STUDY'S PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, AIMS, METHOD AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

With this in mind the proposed study attempted to investigate juvenile delinquent's subjective experiences of how they perceive their families to have influenced the development of their criminal behaviour. An inquiry into the subjective, experiential dimensions of their family lives is believed necessary to enhance understanding of how juvenile behaviour may originate. It is considered by Mkhondo (2005) that a variety of family circumstances can influence the development of crime and therefore need to be identified and tackled if delinquent crime is to be successfully reduced. It is therefore believed necessary to explore in this study how the juvenile offender perceives the structure and functioning of their family and its impact on the development of their juvenile offending behaviour. Furthermore, one aims to understand the juvenile offender's experience of the way in which the family expresses themselves emotionally as well as the emotional responsiveness of the family and whether this impacts on the origin of their unlawful behaviour. In addition to this, attention is paid to the presence of family trauma and whether juvenile delinquents perceive this to be an influential factor in their juvenile offending. By specifically focussing on these participants perceptions of their own family lives, it avoids overly generalised views of the impact of the family functioning on delinquency but rather provides a subjective perspective of these offender's experiences within their different family environments. Becoming familiar with these contributing or influencing factors and seeking ways to address them are at the heart of this research to influence youth crime prevention and intervention.

Given the explorative nature of the study, a qualitative method has been utilised, more specifically thematic content analysis utilising an interpretive stance. This is a frequently accepted qualitative technique which Krippendorff (1980) describes as being utilised to categorise large volumes of material into meaningful units and can consequently be interpreted and placed under common themes thus providing knowledge and insight into how these juvenile delinquents perceive their families to have influenced their behaviour. This method was felt to be useful as it facilitated an exploration of perceptions and subjective experiences, without presuming the family to be a causative factor in the

development of crime. From a theoretical perspective, a family systems approach is investigated as it is useful in explaining family interaction and to conceptualise the impact of the family as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile offenders. In addition to this, one will focus on the development of morality that takes place within the family specifically taking Kohlberg's theory of moral development into account.

## **1.6 CHAPTER ORGANISATION**

As highlighted above, Chapter One provides an introduction into the current research, providing insight into the study's aim and objectives and specifically providing an indication of how such a research is valuable in the South African context. Chapter Two reviews the literature pertaining to how families may impact on criminal offenders and how they perceive their families to be influential factors in the development of their behaviour. It explores the family experiences of juvenile delinquents, focusing on relevant areas and facets of their lives. It covers specific areas of investigation including the family's structure, functioning, emotional expression and responsiveness as well as exposure to family trauma. In addition, theoretical literature pertaining to family systems theory as well as Kohlberg's theory of moral development is referred to in order to provide a theoretical overview of how families can impact on an individuals' development and may influence their later involvement in criminal acts. Chapter Three details the research method of the study, outlining the research aims, research design and procedure, as well as the method of analysis and ethical considerations. Chapter Four comprises the thematic content analysis and discussion of the interview data. Finally, Chapter Five discusses a summary of the overall findings as well as the limitations of the study and implications for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004), the visual images and graphic descriptions provided by the media continually remind society that criminal activity is occurring everyday in all corners of the world. The involvement of juvenile delinquents in these activities has and continues to gain much attention from the media, practitioners and researchers as they form the majority of perpetrators of crime (Sharpe & Litzelfelner, 2004; Palmary & Moat, 2002). As many researchers point out, society has struggled to understand the causation of these activities and consequently fail to identify steps necessary to prevent them from occurring. Thus one approach to understanding the development of juvenile delinquency, and the focal point of this research, is to focus upon the characteristics of their family environment as van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) emphasise the familial role in socialising pro as well as antisocial behaviour in children.

Although research reveals that an individual's involvement in crime is based on a range of complex and intersecting social, personal and environmental factors, Palmary and Moat (2002) reveal how *"for young people, the boundary between being a victim and a perpetrator is often blurred"* (p. 5). Palmary and Moat (2002) go on to highlight how young criminals have been exposed to high levels of victimisation and may have lived under severely adverse social and environmental conditions which include their family situation. This finding is reinforced by an individual committed of crime who states that most people who get involved in criminal activities have a dysfunctional family background and consequently feels that this should be taken into consideration by the government where places of residence should be freely available to children who reside in problematic family and living conditions (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1998). The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998) go on to reveal how delinquent members of their study described their family lives as riddled with tensions and conflict as many experienced disruptions in their family of origin – a psychological legacy which permanently scarred these juvenile offenders.

It is these conditions that may have an influence on the development of crime and thus need to be identified and tackled – and thus becoming familiar with the juvenile offender’s family environment are at the heart of this study. The aim of this chapter is to define a juvenile offender and then looks particularly at what constitutes a family as well as how the family may be seen as a contributing factor in the development of offending behaviour. The main focus of the chapter identifies literature pertaining to both quantitative and qualitative research findings which reveal how the family’s structure, functioning, ability to express and respond emotionally as well as exposure to family trauma may form the origins of juvenile delinquent behaviour. The remainder of the chapter takes a theoretical stance as it utilises a family systems approach as well as Kohlberg’s theory of moral development to describe the possible influence a family may have over the development of morals and criminal behaviour.

## **2.2 DEFINITION OF THE JUVENILE OFFENDER**

Juvenile delinquency is referred to by Dissel (1999b) as the committing of either violent or non-violent crime by persons who are usually under the age of 18 and are still considered to be a minor, as they have committed an offence ordinarily punishable by criminal processes, but who are under the statutory age for criminal responsibility and thus their behaviour has been labelled as delinquent by a court of law. In many different countries the age limits of juveniles vary, and thus within South Africa the juvenile offender, according to the Department of Correctional Services (2005) as well as the Department of Correctional Services (1997), specifically regards all persons under the age of 21 as juveniles and those under the age of 18 as children and having had participated in criminal acts of an antisocial nature. Within this study, the juvenile delinquents were in a diversion programme and were recorded as being under the age of 21 but no younger than 15. Therefore they have been referred to as juvenile offenders and additionally have been utilised interchangeably with the descriptions of ‘delinquents’, ‘children’ and ‘youthful offenders’ – all who have violated the law due to participation in antisocial acts.

Whilst it is difficult to define the domain of what is considered antisocial, broadly speaking, antisocial behaviour according to Sadock and Sadock (2003) indicates an inability to conform to social norms and therefore will be utilised throughout this research.

Individuals labelled as 'antisocial' are characterised by their engagement in criminal acts and have a tendency towards displaying hostility, tension and rage as well as lacking a conscience (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Antisocial individuals are further characterised by Sadock and Sadock (2003) for their violation of the basic rights of others, the violation of societal norms and rules as well as engagement in criminal acts. Throughout the research the term 'antisocial' is used in the descriptive sense rather than in the sense of a formal diagnosis or personality type. The term antisocial is used to refer generically to those engaged in acts which violate property or person's rights and which may include criminal and violent acts. In this sample, antisocial behaviour committed by these offenders encompassed activities such as robbery, grievous bodily harm, theft, assault, rape and attempted rape.

This present study is not however, claiming that participants have an antisocial personality disorder, but rather that they display antisocial behavioural tendencies, some of which may be of clinical significance. In much of the literature, the term antisocial behaviour is used more descriptively than clinically. It has also sometimes been used interchangeably with the term 'aggressive acts', 'criminal behaviour', 'juvenile offending behaviour', 'violence' and 'juvenile delinquent behaviour' when referring to these youthful offender's presentations.

### **2.3 DEFINITION OF THE FAMILY**

Poster (1988) illustrates how the family is being attacked and defended with equal vehemence. It is blamed for oppressing women, abusing children, spreading neurosis and preventing community but alternatively is praised for upholding morality, preventing crime, maintaining order and perpetuating civilization (Poster, 1988). Moreover, Poster (1988) postulates how marriages are being broken on more of a regular basis and on the reverse perspective are being constituted more than ever before. Thus, the family is the place from which one desperately seeks escape as it is viewed by some as boring, stifling and intrusive but on the contrary may also constitute a place to which one longingly seeks refuge as it is deemed as loving, compassionate and intimate (Poster, 1988). From the above, it becomes evident that the definition of a family is a difficult one to achieve as

Poster (1988) indicates how social science does not have an adequate definition of the family or a coherent set of categories from which to analyse it.

Within the last 200 years, Petzold (1998) as well as Poster (1988) go on to reveal that there have been major revolutions in history and society that have shaped the family as it no longer conforms to the traditional nuclear pattern. Harvey (1997) defines the family as individuals who either by contract or agreement, choose to live together intimately and function as a unit in a social and economic system. It is considered by Harvey (1997) to be the primary social unit which ideally provides care, nurturing and socialisation for its members as well as seeks to provide them with physical, economic, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual security. The family presents itself in a variety of forms and structures and Harvey (1997) perceives it to be more accurate to speak of families than to speak of the family. Besides the nuclear family, there are other family forms such as the dual-career family, the one-parent family, the extended family, the three-generational family, the co-habiting family as well as many other new forms which have started flourishing within the last two decades (Petzold, 1998; Harvey, 1997; Regoli & Hewitt, 1994; Poster, 1988). Thus, although the family is still the dominant primary living form, this family is not the traditional father-mother-child triad. On the one hand, Petzold (1998) highlights the trend towards single-parent families as being especially strong in ethnically diverse cultures; however extended families are also believed to dominate these households. This is supported by Poster (1988) who indicates that whilst members of these households are not all blood relations, and their composition not being at all stable, they do constitute 'families' as it includes all members of the household. Therefore, the nuclear family that emerged in the transition to modernity is a unique configuration of behaviours and attitudes, decisively different from what existed before it (Poster, 1988).

This is further illustrated in the multicultural society of South Africa where a variety of factors have lead to other forms and structures of the family. This includes signs of tension being evident in many families as they demonstrate high divorce rates, family violence that takes place in many households, and the high rate of teenage pregnancies and out-of-wedlock births (Statistics South Africa, 2005). At the same time, Statistics South Africa (2005) go on to highlight the adverse effects of the AIDS epidemic and its affect on many

families. Within the South African context, family life must also be seen against the background of cultural diversity and extreme socioeconomic differences where most families – primarily nonwhites – are poor and struggle to satisfy their basic needs (Statistics South Africa, 2005).

Rabie (1996) indicates that predominantly nuclear families have formed within the high socioeconomic groups which range across white, black and coloured groups. However, amongst these groups, the high incidence of out-of-wedlock births has resulted in the replacement of the nuclear family with other structures such as multigenerational families or single-parent households (Rabie, 1996). Alternatively, and predominantly occurring in black families, there are extended families. General extended family patterns are referred to by Rabie (1996) as either vertical (multigenerational) or horizontal (when brothers with their families live with the oldest brother). A further dimension described by Rabie (1996) is also known as composite families, which occurs when the husband has more than one wife, and they all live together (with their children). Generally in extended families, Rabie (1996) highlights how it consists of a wider group of people who are related by blood or marriage and who identify with and care for one another. Rabie (1996) goes on to describe the extended family is usually more stable than a nuclear family and extends over longer periods where in many communities it serves as a social service system that cares for and provides support to various categories of dependents.

Furthermore there is the family which Rabie (1996) illustrates can be differentiated in terms of socioeconomic status as it results in the household exhibiting predominant characteristics. *“First, poverty entails that housing with associated services is lacking or inadequate. Units are small, and children are often left alone at home unsupervised. In high-density areas, two or more nuclear families live together, which strains normal family relationships and places excessively high demands on families with inadequate resources. These circumstances are thus largely responsible for the prevalence of well-organised gang syndicates in many neighbourhoods. Gang activities are common and even school children are recruited to join these complex competing power structures that have a large influence on many households. Gang membership can last until late adolescence and even early adulthood. A second factor is that approximately 43% of births take place outside*

*marriage. This has implications for stable supportive relationships*” (Rabie, 1996, p. 87). Furthermore, Rabie (1996) describes how the socioeconomic conditions of these families often forces its members to separate from one another as parents are often compelled to seek employment away from their families place of residence and consequently have to leave their children in the care of extended family members.

Thus, there is no specific type of family but despite the difficulty in defining what a family is, Petzold (1998) highlights how everyone is at least a member of a family of origin, and many people are also currently members of a primary living group resulting in most individual’s having multiple family memberships. *“Therefore, the ‘family’ is without question a very important concept for almost everybody”* (Petzold, 1998, p. 60). It is assumed by Petzold (1998) that the family gives its members the psychological support that they need in their lifelong development as human beings and thus illustrating that individual life span development is thus marked by many tasks involving a need for general social support which is provided in the form of a family.

With the above explanations in mind, this research focused on various definitions of the family. It looked at the offenders’ family of origin and thus specifically aimed to explore the child’s relationship within the father-mother-child triad. Even if the parents were separated, divorced or one parent was deceased, an examination was conducted about their relationship with their biological parents. However, the focus of the family was not restricted to this traditional nuclear pattern and following this exploration, emphasis was placed on investigating the relationships that existed with *all* members who inhabited the household which included the single-parent, extended family members and siblings as well as families that were differentiated in terms of socioeconomic status. Therefore, this research focused on what Wilkinson (1998) defined as a family in which a *“group of people-united by ties of blood, marriage or adoption; who form a single household; in which they perform their respective roles of husband and wife, son and daughter, mother and father, brother and sister; creating a common culture* “(p. 11). When attempting to examine the family in its different forms, it once again highlights the importance of qualitative research. The significance of gaining subjective opinions of these offenders is extremely relevant as no consistency exists about what constitutes a positive or negative

family and thus obtaining perceptions and experiences from these participants allows one to understand their impressions of their family and what characteristics from this social unit impact upon them.

#### **2.4 CENTRALITY OF THE FAMILY IN JUVENILE OFFENDING**

An individual's first contact with the world, according to Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004), is through the family. Duncan and van Niekerk (2001) additionally state that the family is often perceived as providing the ideal context within which child development can take place. Duncan and van Niekerk (2001) go on further to say that the family unit is pre-eminently suited to satisfy not only children's most basic physiological needs, but also their emotional, cognitive as well as other higher order needs. Research on social support systems, according to Palmary and Moat (2002) as well as Duncan and van Niekerk (2001), credit the family with the function of serving as one of the most effective buffers between children and social stressors through providing significant support in situations that are essentially antagonistic to optimal development (i.e. aids in preventing young people turning to crime). Therefore children who can rely on a supportive family environment are less adversely affected by exposure to traumatic events than are other children (Netshiombo, 1993 as cited in Duncan & van Niekerk, 2001).

Thus, with the above theoretical understandings about the function of the family in mind, Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) highlight that the association between a child's experience in the family and its possible influence on the development of juvenile offending behaviour has long been recognised. According to van der Merwe and Dawes (2000), "*antisocial behaviour, including aggressiveness, destructiveness, deceitfulness, and the violation of social norms, seems to result from a persistent, defensive self orientation and high levels of personal distress; accompanied by an under-development capacity for other-oriented concern*" (p. 21). Therefore links between exposure to chronic violence as well as stressful family situations and development of antisocial dispositions have been postulated by van der Merwe and Dawes (2000). This is supported by Farrington (2002) who states that personal insecurities and psychological problems arising from disturbed family relationships seem to loom large in the delinquents' background.

Moreover, according to social learning principles, the availability of aggressive role models in high-violence communities has implications for the reproduction of violence in youths. *“Different patterns of aggressive (antisocial) and prosocial behaviours are passed on from generation to generation as children participate in everyday activities and model adult modes of conflict resolution”* (van der Merwe & Dawes, 2000, p. 4). This is further illustrated by Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) who go on to describe how specifically the influence of the family is seen in the child’s aspirations, socialisation, attitudes, as well as decisions toward violence and deviance. If the family has deviant attitudes, then the child may adopt these same attitudes and are at a greater risk for forming bonds with other individuals involved in offending behaviour (Sharpe & Litzelfelner, 2004). Gruber and Jones (1983) support this statement by indicating that the chances of participating in juvenile offending behaviour is increased when the home environment is unstable and lacks adequate control over youths’ activities.

The above is explicitly demonstrated in the findings of Leve and Chamberlain (2004) as well as Palmary (2003) who state that early childhood risk factors that occur within the family environment seem to predict the onset of behavioural problems in youth. These contributing factors include family dysfunction, family psychopathology, parental transition, parental criminality, poor supervision, erratic and harsh punishment, parental disharmony, rejection of the child displayed through a lack of involvement in the child’s activities as well as the possible experiences of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse – all of which are family and environmental characteristics that may identify children as being at risk of becoming involved in delinquency problems (Leve & Chamberlain, 2004; Palmary, 2003).

When looking at specific aspects of the family and in particular focusing on the composition of the family within the South African context, the Department of National Health and Population Development (1993) as cited in Duncan and van Niekerk (2001) states that instead of offering children a supportive environment in which their needs can be adequately met and in which they can find nurturance, many families in this country, largely due to the legacy of apartheid, are frequently responsible for the further brutalisation of children. Therefore *“the location of the majority of families in severely*

*over-crowded, under serviced, dreary, poverty-stricken, and crime-ridden townships are causing unbearable tensions in family life, often leading to intolerable levels of frustration and anger – this in turn frequently leads to the neglect and, at times, violent abuse of children within families”* (Angless & Shefer, 1997 as cited in Duncan & van Niekerk, 2001, p. 329).

Furthermore, family functioning is deemed problematic as Leve and Chamberlain (2004) go on to highlight that antisocial behaviour in an individual may be increased if factors such as dysfunctional parental practices in the form of parental criminality and a display of violent behaviour encourage the individual to express behaviour symptoms through internalising behaviours learnt from the parental role-model. McWilliams (1994) goes on to support these theories by stating that the childhood backgrounds of individuals who participate in criminal activities are often rife with insecurity and chaos as confusing amalgams of harsh discipline and overindulgence take place within their family environments. Weak, depressed or unavailable mothers and explosive, inconsistent or sadistic fathers have been linked by McWilliams (1994) with aggressive behaviour, as have alcoholism and other substance abuse in the family of origin. This can additionally be categorised with parental divorce and separation or abandonment in childhood, the use of punitive child-rearing methods and a lack of supervision (Leve & Chamberlain, 2004).

In particular when looking at the affective or emotional expressions and responses in the family of the delinquent, McWilliams (1994) identifies how one can find virtually no consistent, loving or adequately protective family influences. This is supported by De Zulueta (1993) who views criminal behaviour as ‘attachment gone wrong’. Utilising Bowlby’s theory of attachment, De Zulueta (1993) makes a link between early developmental failures and subsequent aggressive and violent behaviour. De Zulueta (1993) identified several factors that have a potential to create hyper-aggressive and acting out behaviour including “*maternal deprivation (defined as a lack of a nurturing social environment); neglect (described as a lack of appropriate supervision or provision of basic needs of the child) and inadequate mothering (described as mothering devoid of love and affection for the infants, based on ignoring, abuse and rejection)*” (p. 73). This is supported by van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) who state that a lack of parental or caregiver warmth

and involvement accompanied by permissiveness, as well as parent-child conflict can all affect the child's development negatively and consequently lead to delinquent behaviour. It is important to note that although these factors may influence the development of criminal behaviour, De Zulueta (1993) also found them to contribute towards the development of social incompetence, fear, suicidal behaviour and depression.

In additional studies, family trauma in the form of physical and sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment, loss of a parental figure via bereavement or due to cessation of contact and the presence of emotional problems were also a common finding within juvenile youths' histories (Mkhondo, 2005; Ryan, Miyoshi, Metzner, Krugman & Fryer, 1996; Elliot & Smiljanich, 1994).

Despite the importance that the family plays in the moulding of an individual's personality and how they function in society, the Department of Correctional Services (2005) is mindful of the fact that it is not only those from dysfunctional families that engage in acts of criminality. To this end, the categories of offenders coming from affluent families, and those committing criminal acts whilst in highly paid employment positions, attest to this (Department of Correctional Services, 2005). Leve and Chamberlain (2004) also highlight that there are other factors contributing to the development of delinquent behaviour. These include school-based socialisation factors, child temperament as well as cognitive and neuropsychological dysfunction (Mkhondo, 2005; Leve & Chamberlain, 2004). Mkhondo (2005) further illustrates how there are many individual and social factors which also impact on the subsequent offending of young people, such as the experience of the effects of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage on their lives – shortages of food and clothing, inadequate accommodation, as well as in some cases being witness to political violence. Thus, although the family has a major influential role in contributing to the development of criminal behaviour, one must not fail to recognise the family's potential protective status as well as taking other potential risk factors into consideration when looking at this population.

*“However, a sober analysis of the composition of South Africa's offender population drives home the reality that the vast majority of our offenders come from families plagued by*

*poverty, hunger, unemployment, absent figures of authority and care, a distorted value system, and general hardship – some of the very factors directly associated with (dysfunctional) families”* (Department of Correctional Services, 2005, p. 34). Therefore the following sections will attempt to address aspects of the family that include child abuse or neglect, parental conflict, rejection, poor monitoring or disorganisation in social contexts all of which are seen as risk factors that can contribute to and increase the probability that children within these environments are more likely to become criminals. These constructs have been divided into sections which specifically focus on the family structure, level of functionality, ability to engage in emotional expression and responsiveness as well as exposure to trauma within the family environment. Although the dimensions of family functioning and emotional expression and responsiveness are not of a specific theoretical orientation, these constructs originated from investigation of the McMaster model of family functioning who according to Wilkinson (1998) focus on the dysfunction of the family in terms of their ability to communicate, problem solve, utilise behavioural control in the form of discipline as well as provide affective involvement and responsiveness. The further dimensions of family structure and exposure to trauma were constructed due to vast amount of literature pertaining to the development of delinquent behaviour as a result of the family’s composition, socioeconomic status and the vast amount of trauma that these individual’s were exposed to (Mkhondo, 2005; Sharpe & Litzelfelner, 2004; Leve & Chamberlain, 2004; Palmay & Moat, 2002; Ryan et al 1996; Elliot & Smiljanich, 1994).

## **2.5 FAMILY STRUCTURE**

When looking at the family structure, Hanna and Brown (2004) focus on the type of organisation and composition of the family. In addition to this, Becvar and Becvar (2003) state that the family system, otherwise known as the family structure, encompasses the arrangement and order of the members within a particular family that form a whole. According to Kilpatrick and Holland (1999) as well as Rabie (1996), this type of family structure can be in the form of single-parented, extended or adoptive families and may even be in the form of the socioeconomic family. Family structure and its composition may be identified as a factor that seems likely to influence the development of juvenile offending behaviour.

Thus when looking at a specific family structure of living in a single-parent, mother-headed household of low economic status, Mkhondo (2005), Katsiyannis et al (2004) and Mercy et al (2002) identified this family organisation as a risk factor, resulting in children who are prone to anxiety-depression symptoms, oppositional behaviour, immaturity and difficulties with peers. This is further evidenced within South Africa where Palmary and Moat (2002) indicate how majority of children under the age of seven live in single-parent, female-headed households, where they have children to feed, clothe and nurture, but with their income being insufficient to cater for basic necessities. *“These are often households where stress is high, as a result of poverty, long working hours, and meeting the demands of children where such situations do not preclude the caregiver from being loving and supportive, but it does make providing for the emotional needs and effective supervision of children much more difficult”* (Palmary & Moat, 2002, p. 6). Thus, as highlighted by Simons et al (2005) as well as Mercy et al (2002), it results in situations where there is a more restricted scope for support and probable fewer economic resources which may be reasons why parenting often suffers as family stress increases and parenting practices are disrupted, and that these changes in the family structure place youth at risk for becoming involved in crime and violence.

In a study conducted by Dissel (1999a) most juvenile delinquent’s were living in overcrowded houses or else were sent to live with other relatives due to poor socioeconomic conditions in the family of origin. Mkhondo (2005) also provides evidence of this, as offender’s predominantly revealed that from very early ages they were sent to live with relatives other than their parents. These youthful offenders often described that living under these circumstances were extremely difficult and often contributed to their acting out behaviour as they longed for contact with their absent biological parents (Mkhondo, 2005).

Furthermore, Mkhondo (2005) highlights how many delinquents come from deprived families, with only one or less members of the household being employed and thus consequently being unable to provide the family with adequate resources and basic needs – whether this be in the form of food or insufficient living facilities. In circumstances like these, Mkhondo (2005) reveals how these juveniles are going to bed without food, not

knowing where the next meal may come from and having only one parental figure to rely on as the other family members have already failed to provide for their essential needs. The inability to obtain such basic necessities of survival can create a shattering experience for these children, resulting in them participating in patterns of behaviour in which they seek instant gratification to meet these needs, hence some of them resorting to violence in order to obtain what they so desperately require to survive (Mkhondo, 2005).

According to the traditional way of being, Carter and McGoldrick (1999) highlight how the first appropriate presentation of the desired family life cycle was focused almost entirely on a two-parent nuclear family for it to be considered developmentally normal and healthy for a child's upbringing. However, Carter and McGoldrick (1999) go on to highlight that in today's modern and constantly changing society, there are developmental models for single-parent families; remarried, blended or stepfamilies; cross-generational, extended families; lesbian, gay and bisexual families; families from diverse cultures as well as poverty stricken families. This provides an indication that these types of families are becoming more common place in our society and thus can not be seen as a singular cause in the development of criminal behaviour.

It is also important to note that although the family structure may impact on the development of crime, Simons et al (2005) state that the nature and collective efficacy of the surrounding community can deter crime and delinquency thus combating the impact of the dysfunctional family. Simons et al (2005) define collective efficacy as the extent to which community residents share values, mutual trust and a disposition to intervene in the public good and thus can function to mediate much of the effect of community structure variables, such as high prevalence of poverty, unemployment, single-parent families, and racial or ethnic heterogeneity. Simons et al (2005) describe how residents of certain communities can show concern for the welfare of their community and thus are motivated to engage in joint problem solving to address threats to the community such as criminal and other antisocial behaviour – this includes a willingness on the part of adults to monitor and correct misbehaving children other than their own and thus form a mediating factor for children who may be predisposed to becoming delinquents due to their dysfunctional family setting. This indicates the potential interactions of the community context and

family variables where Simons et al (2005) illustrate how community factors can moderate the effect of parental behaviour and thus demonstrating how the family cannot be considered in isolation as an influential factor in the development of criminal behaviour.

Mooney (1998) goes on to say that the millions of crimes that are reported to the police every year as well as the millions of crimes that go unreported, it can not totally be blamed on the fraction of single or unemployed mothers who are living in impoverished conditions and have children. *“It does not appear that the fact of lone parenthood is itself associated with crime, but the children of lone parents are more likely to be brought up in poor families, and this appears to be associated with low educational attainment and delinquency”* (Mooney, 1998, p. 215). Therefore as highlighted above, one is referring to poor single-parents and according to Mooney (1998) there is no doubt that poverty is related to crime. Poverty and a lack of structural resources have been found to co-occur with high levels of crime and violence (Osofsky, 1997 as cited in van der Merwe & Dawes, 2000). However, with this in mind, Mooney (1998) points out that to go too far down this path would be to see the structure of society as being at fault, which is not necessarily the case and thus the link between poverty and criminal behaviour is by no means an inevitable relation. This is supported by Simons et al (2005) who state the need to look beyond family structure and economic disadvantage to identify other factors that impact on the development of juvenile offending behaviour. However, according to van der Merwe and Dawes (2000), a family located within a violent community that is additionally strained by economic stress may be forced to choose between providing for their children’s physical needs or addressing their psychological needs within the limited scope of resources. As a result, van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) point out how these children may begin to question the caregiver’s efficacy and authority in relation to providing adequate nurturance and protection. Therefore, as highlighted by Mooney (1998), it is not only impoverishment that has led to a rise in crime, but it may also be due to the disintegrating family that has *“sapped the strength of the working-class community, encouraged the irresponsibility of men, engendered the increase in single mothers and generated the rise in crime”* (p. 217).

## **2.6 FAMILY FUNCTIONING**

Family functioning is defined by Sue, Sue and Sue (2003) as an ability or efficiency in fulfilling duties and responsibilities that are required by that particular person's role in the family. This is supported by the McMaster model of family functioning, which focuses on problem solving, communication, and behaviour control – all roles and responsibilities that are adopted by individuals within the family environment (Wilkinson, 1998). It is also these dimensions that Wilkinson (1998) feels have the greatest impact on the emotional and physical health of family members. Thus, problems within these areas of family functioning are a common finding in the caregivers of juvenile delinquents as they are often unable to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as majority of these caregivers are divorced or separated and may participate in their own inadequate problem-solving abilities such as substance use, violence or crime (Mkhondo, 2005). Furthermore, behaviour control looks at the level of discipline and response styles in which caregivers have consistent behavioural styles of responding in certain situations (Sue et al, 2003). Thus, as highlighted by Simons et al (2005), and in conjunction with several more popular theories of crime and delinquency, they identify how family functioning is a primary influencing factor in the development of delinquent antisocial behaviour.

According to Leve and Chamberlain (2004), parental transitions in the form of divorce or separation often prevent caregivers from providing support to their children, and thus can be seen as significant and powerful predictors that may lead one to follow the pathway of juvenile offending. Additionally, in a South African study conducted by Segal, Pelo and Pampa (1999), these problematic parental relationships which resulted in disrupted and disconnected homes / families was identified as a main factor by young offenders as one that significantly influenced their decision to commit crime as they felt this was the only way they could address their feelings of need. In Segal et al's (1999) study, they often experienced their parents as going through a divorce when they were of an early age and consequently having family lives being riddled with tensions, conflict and of feeling unwanted and unloved by the absent parent.

Mkhondo (2005) and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998) go onto to reveal how juvenile offenders described their family lives as consumed with

tensions and conflict, with their parents getting divorced or separating at an early age and no longer having access to the absent caregivers, resulting in an experience of rejection – psychological legacies that can permanently scar a youngster. According to Mkhondo (2005) the impact of divorce/separation on a young child is one of devastation, self-blame as well as anger and a reason that offenders believed to have contributed towards their unhappy childhood and pain. Juvenile offenders interviewed by Mkhondo (2005) *“felt that their situation made them vulnerable to involvement in crime, citing the negative psychological impact of divorce/separation (painful loss); loss of stability and cohesion which manifested in a lack of parental supervision, reduced nurturance and disruption in economic status”* (p. 17). From the above, one can see that disconnected homes due to parental transitions is an important factor that may influence or contribute to a young child’s decision to participate in criminal activity.

Mkhondo (2005) goes on to reveal how juvenile delinquents often perceived an absent caregiver to be a cause in a large amount of pain, anger and the concept of being filled by an empty void. They also often described having fantasies to kill their absent caregivers in revenge for having abandoned them, as well as their available caregiver for creating disruption in the home environment and consequently leaving the family in a situation of poverty (Mkhondo, 2005). Additionally Mkhondo (2005) indicates how these offenders were often sent to live with other relatives due to disruptions in parental relationships. Whether these parental transitions occurred as a result of divorce, separation or due to bereavement, one caregiver was forced to seek employment away from the family of origin. Thus, although these single-parents, grandmothers, uncles or aunts who acted as effective caregivers may have provided good memories and experiences for these individuals, the majority of them described how they desired their absent caregivers. *“The absence or unavailability of the primary caregiver (who was either working somewhere or unemployed and unable to look after the child, or sometimes deceased or ill), had a negative impact on some of these youths”* (Mkhondo, 2005, p. 16).

On the other hand, Regoli and Hewitt (1994) point out how studies generally report a weak relationship between disconnected homes due to parental transitions and delinquency. Furthermore, Regoli and Hewitt (1994) found that the relationship between disrupted

homes lives and delinquency is stronger for minor forms of delinquency and weakest for serious crime. However, this finding may be misleading. Possibly, the relationship between disturbed parental relationships and delinquency may seem weak because the two variables are separated by several intervening variables (i.e. poor parent-child relationships, factors leading up to the divorce as well as parental criminality) (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994). With this in mind, one must not disregard parental transitions which consequently result in a dysfunctional home environment as influencing the development of juvenile delinquency but perhaps one would need to look deeper into the individual intervening factors that are present within these disconnected homes.

When specifically looking at the roles and responsibilities of the parents within the delinquent's family, Katsiyannis et al (2004) as well as McCord (1999) provides evidence about parental criminality where children of criminal fathers are at high risk for demonstrating aggressive and criminal behaviour themselves. Although some might interpret this relationship as being indicative of biological propensities in the development of criminal behaviour, McCord (1999) states that it is reasonable to suspect that criminal parents differ from non-criminal parents in the way they interact with their families and thus having to take adverse socialising conditions into consideration. This is supported by McCord's (1999) findings which demonstrates that the criminality of father's does appear to be a risk factor for crime amongst their children, but that social factors such as alcohol abuse, severe family conflict and aggression have a further impact on the children – indicating that parental conflict and parental aggression can be considered as instigating factors as no protective measures are in place to counteract these aggressive and hostile environments.

Furthermore, Leve and Chamberlain (2004) and Dissel (1999b) indicate that for these juvenile offenders, having a parent who has been convicted of a crime may initiate risk factors and negative consequences for these offenders that make them prone to have similar experiences. For these individuals whose parents have a criminal history, it results in an absence of parental guidance, support and socialisation where individuals begin to look to peers for support – where the morals, values and ethics gained from these peers may be seen as deviant and violent (Sharpe & Litzelfelner, 2004). Additionally, if a parent is

convicted of a crime, Leve and Chamberlain (2004) explain how this may make parental transitions likely to occur, as one parent becomes incarcerated resulting in offenders being dually affected by their parent's criminal behaviour.

It is true then that parents may pass on delinquent values and practices to their children, however, according to Regoli and Hewitt (1994) parents with criminal records do not encourage criminality in their children and are 'censorious' towards their criminality, as are parents with no criminal involvement. Research shows, as highlighted by Regoli and Hewitt (1994), that these parents generally may not want their children to engage in criminal behaviour and appear upset at their delinquency. However, research studies generally show that children with criminal parents are more likely to participate in acts of delinquency.

Further dysfunction in the family is highlighted by Simons et al (2005) as well as Mercy et al (2002) who go on to state that involvement of parents in a hostile, coercive romantic relationship, may predict increases in these delinquents affiliation with deviant peers and crime. This is supported by Mkhondo (2005) whose research indicates that some juvenile delinquents related how their home environments involved them observing their fathers physically abusing their mothers, which modelled and contributed to their use of force, aggression and violence. Some participants, according to Mkhondo (2005), described how they even saw violence modelled by their older siblings feeling that they knew no better and consequently being exposed to an upbringing that taught them that through fighting one can prove that they are powerful and demand respect. This is supported by Bhana and Hochfeld (2001) who state that these children learn aggressive behaviour as it is the only method of conflict resolution or communication they see in their homes; learning that violence is a means to control situations, maintain power, and that it invariably works. Not only is this detrimental to the individual, it also has *"potentially serious criminal implications for their future as adults and their prospective families and may be the training ground for violence in society"* (Bhana & Hochfeld, 2001, p. 16).

Moreover, juvenile offenders, according to Baker et al (2003), are more likely to be raised in families in which more lies, the presence of family myths, taboo behaviour and secrecy

are prominent components of the family style of relating. This factor of family deception was highlighted by Baker et al (2003) to significantly increase the odds of offending behaviour over and above other measures of family pathology – thus indicating the multigenerational family pattern of secrecy and deception. Baker et al (2003) go on to explain how clinical literature suggests that families of juvenile offenders are often seen as being rife with secrecy where *“important things were kept secret from members of the family. Some parents had other children of which current children were not aware; in some cases children were unaware of previous husbands of their mothers; incarcerations were kept secret, although the person had been living in the house at the time they were sentenced to jail. Parents made up stories about persons who disappeared, or children were told not to ask questions”* (Johnson, 1988 as cited in Baker et al, 2003, p. 106). With this in mind, it is adequate to say that family secrecy has many potential negative consequences for the normal development of children, which according to Baker et al (2003) include lack of intimacy, distorted reality as well as feelings of powerlessness, all which are common characteristics of the juvenile offender and may contribute to their acting out behaviour.

Family secrets, according to Imber-Black (1998) function to play a relative role in modulating intimacy and distance amongst family members because when children are brought up in an environment rife with secrecy and deception, they feel cut-off and distant from the people most important to them as well as confused about how to develop close relationships based on honesty and trust. This results in various alliances and boundaries forming within the family based on the knowledge about the secret, with the effect of isolating family members from one another (Imber-Black, 1998). In other words, Baker et al (2003) explain that a feeling of being isolated, disconnected and outside the mainstream of society may function to loosen the inhibitions against socially unacceptable behaviour such as committing violent acts. Additionally, it seems that decreased identification with social norms can also be associated with diminished empathy for others, which may also contribute to the development of juvenile offending behaviour (Baker et al, 2003).

Contrary to the above evidence, examining the case records of these delinquents, Baker et al (2003) revealed that these offenders had no evidence of family deceptions in their

records. However, it is important to note that agency records may underreport certain aspects of family experiences and therefore it cannot be known whether records simply did not provide evidence for coding them (Baker et al, 2003). Thus, as this study shows, secrecy may be a contributing factor to the onset of juvenile offending behaviour, however it is also important to bear in mind that demonstrating prevalence of secrecy and deception in families of offenders is but the first step in determining its status as a vulnerability or risk factor.

Furthermore, in recognising how children learn, McCord (1999) focuses on the impact and effect that caregivers have on their children through learning and modelling. McCord (1999) claims that categories of descriptions form potentiating reasons for an agent to behave in specified ways as learned from their surrounding social environment and therefore *“both natural and artificial contingencies inform the child about the world and how to act within it”* (p. 247). In teaching children how to act, McCord (1999) believes that parents display a variety of cues that indicate the values that they themselves place on various grounds for action. Therefore with regard to this study, one aims to look at the way caregivers behaviours and responses occur consistently and emotionally to the juvenile offender within the family in order to establish whether cues and contingencies learned from their parents inform their criminal behaviour.

According to Mkhondo (2005), the nature of the socialisation and discipline a child is exposed to during development also plays a role in enhancing resilience against the development of criminal behaviour. McCord (1999) highlights how maternal affection for the child accompanied by consistent non-punitive disciplinary methods as well as the presence of adequate supervision are considered to be protective factors in preventing an individual from engaging in criminal behaviour. This is referred to as an authoritative parental style which has been found to create a climate of resilience toward the development of conduct problems and offending behaviour as Mkhondo (2005) highlights how it involves setting firm rules and limits but this is accompanied by a loving, understanding approach which continues to encourage independence. This atmosphere of warm approval, praise and acceptance is described by Mkhondo (2005) as well as Simons et al (2005) to foster children's social, cognitive and moral development as well as being

positively associated with school achievement, psychological well-being and adequate social adjustment. Thus adopting an authoritative parenting style is considered a protective factor due to the fact that it appears in most instances that parental control (i.e. establishing rules, monitoring and consistent discipline, is an expression of the parent's affection and support of the child) (Simons et al, 2005).

Importantly, Mkhondo (2005) reveals how these parents are able to explain how certain behaviours will affect other people resulting in a child being able to think about consequences, understand other people's motives or needs and thus developing a sense of social competence and concern for others. Thus through authoritative parenting and provision of social control, trusting and cohesive relationships tend to foster feelings of reciprocity and mutual obligation, and this helps them to integrate this knowledge with their capacity for empathy and thus decreases their chances of engaging in delinquent behaviours (Mkhondo, 2005; Simons et al, 2005). Moreover, *“pro-social behaviour in children can also be fostered when parents are warm and loving, if they reason with the child rather than punish and threaten them, and when they model and encourage their children to get along with others, to be helpful and caring, and to control their emotions”* (Mkhondo, 2005, p. 32). In other words, and as indicated by Simons et al (2005), it is not simply providing the child with control, but supportive control that is most efficacious in reducing the probability of antisocial behaviour. Mkhondo (2005) goes on to describe how children can imitate antisocial acts like aggression from adults, other children, as well as television. Parents can provide positive encouragement for the child to replace aggression with other behaviour (like verbalizing their anger in words rather than in physical attacks) and thus teaching the child what they cannot do, as well as what they should do (Mkhondo, 2005). Such descriptions of how to develop resilience toward criminal behaviour reveals the importance of adequate and authoritative discipline within the family.

Alternatively, those parents who attempt to exercise strict control in the absence of warmth and support, according to Simons et al (2005) as well as McCord (1999) may lead to the production of opposition and defiance in their children as they tend to perceive their surrounding environment in a hostile manner. *“Furthermore, such biased cognitions seem to mediate a link between early harsh discipline and subsequent aggression”* (McCord,

1999, p. 250). With this in mind, family vulnerabilities that are seen as contributing factors that may lead to the onset of aggressive and violent behaviour in young people include parental aggression as well as harsh, inconsistent and physical discipline along with poor monitoring and supervision of these young people by their parents (Mkhondo, 2005; Simons et al, 2005; Palmary & Moat, 2002; Mercy et al, 2002).

Osofsky (1997) as cited in van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) highlight how the use of harsh and more punitive disciplinary practices reduces the availability of non-aggressive, empathic models for their children. In support of this assertion, van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) illustrates how a study conducted by Bells and Jerkins (1994) revealed that children exposed to high incidences of violence found that aggressive behaviour of young males was related to their caregiver/s' use of physical punishment and exposure to domestic conflict. This is supported by McCord (1999) who found that some father's use of corporal punishment predicted an increased likelihood that their child would subsequently be convicted for a serious crime. On the other hand, the mother's use of corporal punishment predicted an increased likelihood that the child would subsequently be convicted for a serious violent crime (McCord, 1999).

By punishing severely and inconsistently, as highlighted by Mkhondo (2005), parents may stimulate the child's anger and provide a model of aggressive behaviour. In agreement, van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) describe how under these conditions children tend to model parental control styles, including aggressive behaviour, and consequently adopting them as a means of exerting control in a disempowering environment. Thus, according to van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) *"at the cultural level, a widespread acceptance of, and desensitisation to fictive and actual violence, reproduces and legitimises violence as a means of interacting. The result is that there are few opportunities to acquire alternative conflict-resolution or problem-solving strategies"* (p. 23).

Patterson (1997) as cited in Mbhele (2003) goes on to emphasise the role of unskilful management practices which are characterised by the reinforcement of coercive behaviour, lack of rewards being provided for prosocial behaviour as well as ineffective and inconsistent punishment of deviant behaviour, arguing that this can influence the

development of antisocial behaviour in childhood. The child's coercive interaction patterns are further hypothesised by van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) to produce rejection by prosocial peers, academic failure, membership of a deviant group, and thus resulting in the facilitation of the child's continued participation in antisocial activities.

On the other hand, Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) indicate that the disorganisation and decline of the family can lead to increases in the likelihood that young members of the family go unsupervised and may not receive orders or regulation, resulting in several of these children seeking socialisation, order and regulation on the streets. This is supported by Palmary and Moat (2002) who suggested that parents and caregivers experience social circumstances which require them to spend much of their time on activities other than childcare; and therefore resulting in many children being vulnerable to affiliation with criminal behaviour or deviant peers. *“Individuals are at a greater risk for victimisation as a result of the frustration and violence present in the disorganised family and are therefore at greater risk for delinquency or problem behaviours”* (Sharpe & Litzelfelner, 2004, p. 75). Additionally, Smith (2006) as well as Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) point out how a lack of parental supervision can contribute to an individual's use of substances at an early age and how those who have a substance abuse history are more likely to engage in antisocial and delinquent behaviour.

The absence of parental guidance and support has also been affiliated to the development of delinquent behaviour. It was illustrated by Palmary and Moat (2002) that majority of children living in townships were left without any supervision during the day, resulting in many children being vulnerable to abuse or involvement with deviant peers due to a lack of parental guidance and support. This is supported by Simons et al (2005) who state that adequate parenting results in a variety of strategies being employed that influence their child's peer affiliations and friendship choices. This is done through *“encouraging their children to join one peer group over another, carefully selecting the schools that their children attend, and promoting participation in various conventional activities such as organised sports and other extracurricular activities at school – such parenting practices reduce a child's affiliation with deviant peers”* (Simons et al, 2005, p. 992). Thus, in addition to directly decreasing the risk of conduct problems, Simons et al (2005) highlight

that adequate parental involvement and supervision decreases the probability of child antisocial behaviour indirectly by diminishing the chances of affiliation with deviant peers. Alternatively, Bischof et al (1992) found that there are two types of family systems in which the juvenile offender could be situated: *“either the family is very rigid and enmeshed, with extremely strict rules and a perfectionist bent to parental expectations, or they are very chaotic with a great deal of role confusion”* (p. 319). This indicates that these families could either be inflexible or too flexible; that they appear too close emotionally – the possible result being a dysfunctional family system that may discourage or prevent healthy development amongst its members (Bischof et al, 1992). Due to this research being conducted over a decade ago as well as no other theoretical information regarding this phenomenon being gathered, it could indicate its possibly invalidity. Additionally, Bischof et al (1992) state that such a hypothesis was based solely on clinicians clinical impressions, again emphasising the possibly invalidity of these findings.

Thus, Pistorius (2005) as well as Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) emphasise that, as a child, a large amount of delinquents grow up in a negative environment where the home atmosphere is generally characterised by negligence, secrecy, substance abuse, negative discipline being carried out and a lack of positive role models. However, just as parental control is an expression of parental affection and concern for the child, Simons et al (2005) emphasise that community control appears to be an expression of the residents’ concern and commitment to their community. Thus, although a child may reside in a dysfunctional family, they may be surrounded by a caring and collective community which serve as a protective factor for these children and can prevent their involvement in antisocial behaviour. Thus, Simons et al (2005) provide strong evidence that collective efficacy, like authoritative parenting, deters affiliation with deviant peers and delinquency (i.e. indicating that supportive control, whether at the level of the community or the family, discourages antisocial behaviour). Simons et al (2005) additionally states that supportive control is not only provided by parents but can also be supplied by teachers, employees, neighbours as well as the surrounding community. This indicates that although the effects of some of these relationships, such as the family, may be more powerful than that of the others, Simons et al (2005) expect that each makes a unique contribution to an individual’s overall

pattern of conformity – and therefore requires one to consider community factors, and not just the family, that can result in the probability of juvenile's engaging in antisocial behaviour or associating with deviant peers.

## **2.7 FAMILY EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS AND RESPONSIVENESS**

Emotional expressions and responsiveness is referred to by Bischof, Stith and Wilson (1995) as the extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and to express their feelings effortlessly and directly with one another and thus creating an environment of connectedness and cohesion. This dimension also looks at the range of affective responses family members have towards one another. Wilkinson (1998) highlights how the McMaster approach to emotional expression and responsiveness investigates whether or not family members are able to respond to each others feelings that are experienced. Furthermore, the assessment of expressed emotion, according to Sadock and Sadock (2003), involves analysing the manner in which caretakers behave (i.e. the level of involvement expressed toward another family member). This is supported by Wilkinson (1998) who states that this dimension focuses on the extent to which the family shows interest in or value for particular activities of family members – more specifically focusing on the family's interest in each other and the manner in which this interest is expressed.

Good parenting and loving families where respect and warm interpersonal relationships exist are reported by Palmary and Moat (2002) to act as buffers to protect young individuals against involvement in crime. This is reinforced by Mkhondo (2005) as well as Dove (1998) as cited by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998), who state that the presence of a good attachment with a caregiver is critical in the early years of a child's life – a crucial period for the development of a sense of self – and when this does not occur, possibly leaving these youngsters with a 'fragmented sense of self, lacking in cohesion', with the potential of getting involved in violent crime. This is supported by Palmary and Moat (2002) who describe how many young people in South Africa are growing up in families deprived of respectful, warm and loving interpersonal relationships and that it these aspects that may contribute to these children potentially becoming involved in criminal activities. Moreover, the presence of neglect or abandonment by parents where poor parent-child interactions are strongly implicated in the

development of juvenile offending behaviour. (Mkhondo, 2005; Katsiyannis et al, 2004; Mercy et al, 2002; McCord, 1999; Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1998; Bischof et al, 1992).

This is acknowledged in a study conducted by Mkhondo (2005) where juvenile delinquents portrayed themselves as having no self, as being lifeless, led by evil and seeing themselves as inhuman. They related this sense of deadness to the absence of meaningful attachments and relationships as, according to Mkhondo (2005), it manifested feelings of being unloved, worthless, to an absence of happiness, to poor achievement and a lack of a sense of accomplishment. In an additional study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998) criminal offenders spoke of being abandoned or kicked out of their homes, resulting in feelings of loss and of being unloved. Thus, some felt that the only way to develop self-esteem and the ability to achieve this was to exert power and control in the sense of criminal and aggressive behaviour.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory supports this notion as it makes a contribution towards the understanding of criminal behaviour. Bowlby (1973) highlights how the unavailable or rejecting caregiver who is unable to demonstrate a display of empathy cannot identify with the child's feelings and needs. In turn, Bowlby (1973) hypothesises that the child consequently learns to be hostile in interactions with others, develops a poor sense of self-esteem, develops a notion of egocentricity, and shows little empathy accompanied by a large display of aggression towards others. Dissel (1999a) has a similar point of view as the loss of connectedness to parents or other role models can lay the foundation for the development of negative relationships with deviant peer groups, through which exposure to criminal activity may be a possibility. This is supported by McWilliams (1994) who describes how the antisocial person has simply never been able to attach psychologically, incorporate good objects or identify with unavailable caregivers. Thus, this individual could not take in love and consequently has never loved another and instead has identified with a 'stranger self-object' which is experienced as predatory (Grotstein, 1982 as cited in McWilliams, 1994).

Majority of the above stated experiences, were revealed in Mkhondo's (2005) study of juvenile delinquents and what they felt influenced their criminal behaviour. Mkhondo (2005) goes onto reveal how the nature of the relationship with some of their parents / caregivers was described as distant, conflictual, lacking in communication and devoid of love and warmth. This is supported by Bischof et al (1992) where participants often described their families as emotionally disengaged and less cohesive in nature. Participants felt that their mother's demonstrated feelings of disinterest and lacking in pride toward them as children, but instead were exposed to constant criticisms (Mkhondo, 2005). The participants in this study, according to Mkhondo (2005) described such experiences as a form of rejection or abandonment that resulted in majority of them feeling unlovable and unworthy of their parent's love and consequently resulting in the development of their anger and bitterness. The need for acceptance and love by a parental figure was voiced by many of these youth and thus highlighted by Mkhondo (2005) as an important factor to be looked at in the development of juvenile offending behaviour.

Due to these children receiving no sympathy, protection, feelings of love or reassurance from other people, especially their caregivers, Katsiyannis et al (2004) reports how juvenile offenders generally report a lower need for approval or support from others, which seems to give an indication of the tendency to develop poor relationships, mistrust and disengagement. Loneliness and emptiness, according to participants in a study conducted by Mkhondo (2005), are prevalent emotions in the lives of juvenile offenders due to some of them being rejected, abandoned and neglected. Mkhondo (2005) goes on to explain how these individuals felt that this loneliness and emptiness may lead to feelings of powerlessness, where no identity can be formed and feelings of being recognised as important individuals may not experienced, and as a result can lead to a hunger for protection, for belonging, and for security-feelings, which they felt they could only achieve through the participation in criminal activities.

On the other hand, Bischof et al (1992) stated that the juvenile sexual offender's family tend to be over-involved, enmeshed, with diffuse internal boundaries, and closed external boundaries. Some of these families were often reported by Bischof et al (1992), to rely on their family almost exclusively for support and can be regarded as socially isolated,

indicating that extreme cohesion or intensive emotional bonding that the family members have toward one another, can be seen as an influencing factor that may lead to the development of an offending juvenile.

Despite these findings not everyone exposed to these family types, whether neglectful or enmeshed, develop maladaptive coping strategies, and this can be attributed to the availability of a variety of supportive factors that may help in mediating these family experiences. This is supported by Palmary and Moat (2002) who state that coming from a loving family does not prevent young people from turning to crime, but it does add to a young person's resilience levels.

## **2.8 FAMILY TRAUMA**

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) defines trauma as a traumatic action where the person experiences or witnesses an event that involved actual or threatened death, or serious injury. In response to this traumatic event, the American Psychiatric Association (1994) describes the person as experiencing intense fear or helplessness as this person either knows or believes that they, or others in the situation, may be injured or killed. Great danger is involved and the person feels absolutely powerless (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). According to Palmary and Moat (2002), very little is known about the implication of victimisation for young people's involvement in crime and violence; about whether victimised youth become violent themselves and why. However, research conducted by Palmary and Moat (2002) with young criminals revealed that many of them were victims of violence or abuse during their childhood. This involved either being exposed or witness to serious violent acts as well as death of family members and often resulted in these delinquent youth feeling helpless, powerless and defeated (Palmary & Moat, 2002).

*“His parents died by the time he was one year old, his father from natural causes, his mother from a drug overdose. At eight years of age, he was sexually victimised while in foster care and, at the age of 12, witnessed a young man shot to death over foul play in a basketball game. As an adolescent, he has served time in the juvenile justice system for aggravated assault, harassment, and sexual assault – reacting destructively to himself and*

*others following two decades of traumatic events in his life*” (Baer & Maschi, 2003, p. 85-86). What is described here is common in the histories of delinquents who pass through the juvenile justice system as Baer and Maschi (2003) state that trauma can potentially lead to serious juvenile offending behaviour as children whose lives are shaped by trauma seem to perceive and encode social cues differently than non-traumatised individuals. As a result, Mkhondo (2005) as well as Baer and Maschi (2003) found that a large amount of the juvenile offenders who enter into the criminal justice system, display a psychosocial history that generally is indicative of family trauma, including parental substance abuse, physical and/or sexual victimisation, witness to violence within the home environment, and loss through bereavement or cessation of contact with a significant person. These constitute a major source of childhood trauma, *“which depending on how it is handled, may later contribute to disordered behaviour, including aggression or violence”* (Dissel, 1999b, p. 25).

Pistorius (2005) as well as Dolan, Holloway, Bailey and Kroll (1996) highlight how it has been found that violent experiences/traumas during childhood have a negative effect on the formation of the personality of the offender as this experience resulted in dysfunctional upbringings and therefore as a consequence results in individuals demonstrating higher levels of personal disturbance. Baker et al (2003) agree with this, as they noted that children who were witness to violence within the family or were sexually abused tend to live with feelings of secrecy and isolation. The ‘footprints’ of these traumas are often carried into adolescence or adulthood in the form of internalised shame and denial which may cause feelings of depression, anxiety, powerlessness as well as distorted ideas about the self and others (Salter, 1995 as cited in Baker et al, 2003). As a result, Pistorius (2005) states how the juvenile offender, when exposed to direct and indirect emotional traumas may start to develop aggressive and vengeful fantasies which can be acted out in play and towards other children and animals.

With this understanding in mind, Mkhondo (2005) expresses the high incidence of traumatic experiences that occur amongst these juvenile delinquents. Specifically, Mkhondo (2005) as well as Dissel (1999a) reveal how loss and grief was prevalent in the childhood lives of all these youth – losses of significant people in their lives including

breadwinners, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and siblings via bereavement or cessation of contact with a family member. The testimonies of these prisoners about losses and the impact it had on them painted a clear picture for Mkhondo (2005) of the importance of meaningful relationships. Mkhondo (2005) continues to highlight how the destruction of these relationships during the early years of development was cited by these youths as having a major impact on the development of their aggressiveness, pain and confusion. Dissel (1999a) believes that loss constitutes a major source of childhood trauma which, depending on how it is handled, may later contribute to disordered behaviour, including violence and aggression – thus stating that the loss or absence of a strong family member may influence the child's engagement in criminal behaviour.

Furthermore, research conducted by Mkhondo (2005) revealed 42% of female juvenile delinquents reporting to have been exposed to some form of sexual violation in childhood or early adolescence. This is supported by Contos Shoaf (2002) whose findings reveal that criminals were often sexually or physically abused as children, and which is assumed to have an impact on their display of aggressive and violent behaviour. Pistorius (2005), Contos Shoaf (2002), Palmary and Moat (2002) as well as McCord (1999) support this statement by describing offenders as those who were sexually and physically abused as children, which may have been influencing factors that could have led to the development of their criminal behaviour.

They related traumatic experiences of being consumed with fear and feelings of being insecure and unsafe as they were growing up, to being raped or gang raped and being sexually abused in childhood and how these experiences had a negative impact on their lives (Mkhondo, 2005). Physical and emotional abuse, according to Mkhondo (2005), was also reported by a significant number of participants. It was described by Mkhondo (2005) how their caregivers or parents often utilised coercive techniques to force submission in their children and frequently resulted in physical injury. Mkhondo (2005) went on to illustrate how they described their parents as unpredictable which lead to the installation of extreme fear, vulnerability and helplessness and often providing them with the inability to distinguish between a loving or an unhealthy relationship. Other youths experienced emotional abuse from parents who continuously criticised and degraded them through

malicious name calling, which Mkhondo (2005) feels impacted on the development of their self worth. *“The pervasive terror in their environments often created mistrust of the world for these boys and girls and resulted in run-away attempts. Some of them reported escaping to live with friends, boyfriends or girlfriends who forced them into criminal acts like theft, house breaking or selling drugs”* (Mkhondo, 2005, p. 19).

On the other hand, Loucks and Zamble (2000) indicate that although evidence is provided of high levels of previous sexual and physical abuse in juvenile delinquents; these factors cannot be totally related to criminal or violent behaviour, and, at best, they may be secondary to some endogenous personality or behavioural factors. Thus Loucks and Zamble (2000) go on to state that even though there is ample evidence in the literature that various forms of childhood abuse can have a profound effect on behavioural and emotional adjustment in both childhood and adulthood; these effects do not appear to be specific to criminal behaviour.

Moreover, although exposure to family trauma may be seen as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour, exposure to other violent and traumatic experiences may impact on the origin of aggressive behaviour. Palmay and Moat (2002) support this through providing evidence of refugee children and children fleeing war or community conflict as being particularly vulnerable to the development of antisocial behaviour. Mkhondo (2005) goes on to highlight how juvenile delinquents in a research were exposed to a large amount of community violence which resulted in them describing how it lead to the development of their decreased school performance, substance abuse, behavioural problems as well as emotional disturbances. Specifically, participants in Mkhondo’s (2005) study portrayed how they had become desensitised to violence as a result of being witness to stabbings, shootings and murder which took place in their communities. Mkhondo (2005) revealed how these individuals felt that living in such environments provided them with limited opportunities for learning appropriate problem solving skills, social skills and conflict resolution which may have contributed to their aggressive acting out behaviour. Furthermore, one has to consider that people in South Africa are traumatised on a daily basis, however some of these individuals continue to lead healthy and normal lives, and therefore it is important to keep in mind that not everyone

exposed to traumatic life events develop maladaptive coping strategies, and this has been attributed to the availability of supportive and protective factors that help in mediating the traumatic experience (Mbhele, 2003).

## **2.9 SUMMARY OF FAMILY FINDINGS**

In conclusion, Mkhondo (2005) found that among the offenders currently serving sentences, over a third came from families where the parents were divorced or separated, a quarter had a father who was violent to their mother; almost three-quarters had problems in school, one sixth had abused drugs, a quarter had mental health problems, and two-thirds were unemployed. These themes can be viewed as indicators of risk factors that created a vulnerability to violent behaviour, rather than as causal factors. Thus, it appears that although the prevalence of risk factors may be one indicator of criminality, it is by no means a conclusive one (Mkhondo, 2005). Although the previous sections have provided an outline of the prevailing family conditions which are seen as influencing factors in the development of criminal behaviour; at the same time, however, the particular elements of such a family 'community' should not be placed in a social vacuum.

To support this, Palmary and Moat (2002) go on to highlight how many young people overcome severely traumatic childhood experiences which also include disruptions in their family structure, functioning or emotional expressions and become productive and well-adjusted members of society. Personal attributes such as intelligence, self-esteem, good interpersonal skills, exposure to a warm responsive and responsible family, supportive and consistent parenting, access to education, as well as extra-familial peer or adult support in the form of meaningful community and social involvement are thought by Palmary and Moat (2002) to assist young people make a successful adaptation despite exposure to high-risk conditions. Although the family is emphasised as one of the protective factors, Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) as well as Palmary and Moat (2002) indicate that no one factor, or even a combination of factors, will definitely result in a young person being involved in crime and violence. Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) go on to state that adverse outcomes such as criminal behaviour result from multiple and overlapping risk factors and thus accumulation of risk is strongly related to adversity.

This evidence is strengthened by Mkhondo (2005) who describes how violence is a multi-determined and complex phenomenon that challenges us to take into consideration individual motives, the crime context, as well as social, economic, cultural and individual backgrounds in order to understand it. While to a great extent violent offending may be triggered by the social environment, Mkhondo (2005) also highlights how the individual's personality and character also play a critical role. To sustain this assertion van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) go on to state that the following protective factors reduce the negating impact of exposure to violence on the individual's development: the age of the child; the type and frequency of violence exposure; the characteristics of the community; the family support structures; the child's familiarity with both the victim and the perpetrator of violence; previous experiences of trauma as well as the proximity of the violent event. Additionally, the scope of this study does not permit an investigation into the wide spectrum of community, political, cultural and sub-cultural trends which elicit individual's criminal behaviour and therefore for the purpose of this study the variable of one of the most important primary factors (i.e. the family environment) are of particular interest.

Once again it is important to demonstrate the central role that the family environment and parental behaviour may have on the development of violent behaviour in young people. In South Africa, Swart-Kruger (1996) emphasise how the family is still regarded as the normal biological and social structure, which should guide the growth and development of a child. *"This perception still underpins the political mindset in South Africa and informs social policy, as it does in many parts of the world"* (Swart-Kruger, 1996, p. 23). This is due to the fact that the family provides the basic material goods for the survival, growth and development of the child (Pandey, 1991). Pandey (1991) goes on to explain how the family nurtures its young, provides affection and as the children grow, it becomes a powerful socialising agent, shaping the individual's capacity for personal relationships and preparing them for the complex world. Furthermore, according to Pandey (1991), the family provides the individual with a continuity of identity, a network of relations, roots to their past as well as branches for the future. It promotes the individual's growth and because of its dynamic quality, its functions change over time in terms of its member's needs and problems (Pandey, 1991). With all this in mind, it can be seen how the

interpersonal relationships within the family have a strong impact on the individual and therefore can be seen as an instigating factor in the development of aggressive and violent behaviour (Mercy et al, 2002).

## **2.10 THEORETICAL / CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The following section takes a theoretical stance by looking at family systems theory as well as morality and its development utilising Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The contributions that these theories and their relation to the research study will be the prime focus of the next section as both provide emphasis on how an individual is susceptible to the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour and its relation to their family.

### **2.10.1 Family Systems Theory**

A thorough examination of the various sociocultural contexts of juvenile offenders is beyond the scope of this study; however, one significant context for its development is the family system. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), juveniles do not appear one day as fully developed offenders; rather they grow up in family systems – a social ecology that shapes their personalities and course of development over time. Thus, the behaviour of each individual inhabitant in the family is influenced by the reciprocal interactions among family members (Bischof et al, 1992). Thus, in order to conceptualise the impact of the family as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile offenders, *family systems theory* is useful in explaining family interaction and to help understand their family lives. Minuchin (1974) highlights how a family systems perspective holds that individuals are best understood through assessing the interactions that occur within, between and amongst family members as it is believed that structural changes in families must occur before individual members' symptoms can be reduced or eliminated – thus indicating that the development of a specific behaviour in individuals may be as a result of family influences.

Within families, Becvar and Becvar (2003) states how one discovers who they are and one develops and changes accordingly. Within the setting of the family one creates, maintains, and lives by often unspoken rules and routines that one hopes will keep the family (and each of its members) functional (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). Thus, Corey (2005), Becvar and Becvar (2003), Walsh (1981) as well as Epstein, Bishop and Levin (1978) all describe how

the development and behaviour of one family member is inextricably interconnected with others in the family. Symptoms are often seen as an expression of a set of habits and patterns within a family and therefore, according to Corey (2005), Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004) as well as Sue et al (2003), it is revolutionary to conclude that the identified client's problem might be a symptom of how the system functions and not only a symptom of the individual's maladjustment, history and psychosocial development. This is supported by Epstein et al (1978) who states that the structure and the organisation of the family are significant in determining the behaviour of members of the family and also illustrates how the manner in which family members relate to one another further shapes their behaviour. *"This perspective is grounded on the assumptions that a client's problematic behaviour may (1) serve a function or purpose for the family, (2) be unintentionally maintained by the family processes, (3) be a function of the family's inability to operate productively, especially during developmental transitions, or (4) be a symptom of dysfunctional patterns handed down across generations"* (Corey, 2005, p. 424). All this needs to be taken into account when looking at the juvenile offender's family environment as violence may be transmitted across the generations in what Bowen (1978) refers to as a multigenerational effect.

Bowen (1978) goes on to stress how important parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents are in influencing the values and conflicts present in the current nuclear family. Bowen (1978) believes that the behaviour and attitudes of children are shaped by their entire genealogy and that the influence of the multigenerational family is absolute. One behavioural pattern that has been documented in a plethora of studies involves the intergenerational transmission of physical aggression (Berg-Cross, 2000). Berg-Cross (2000) goes on to state that when children are exposed to aggression between specific family members (parent and child, husband and wife) they learn the 'appropriateness' of such behaviour between the inhabitants of those family roles. Thus, as highlighted by Berg-Cross (2000), parents hitting children teaches the acceptability of parent/child aggression, and spouse abuse teaches the acceptability of husband/wife aggression. The modelling of aggressive family role relationships has been documented by Kalmuss (1984) as cited in Berg-Cross (2000) in a survey of over 2000 adults: *"When*

*neither form of aggression occurred (parent-child or husband-wife) in one's childhood family, the probability of the husband being physically aggressive is 1% ... When only parent-child hitting occurred, the probability increased to 3%. With only husband-wife hitting, the probability doubles to 6%. Finally, when both types of childhood aggression occurred, the probability of severe husband aggression is 12%" (p. 19).*

Note that although there is clear-cut unambiguous evidence for the intergenerational transmission of family aggression, Berg-Cross (2000) illustrates that the extent of this transmission is quite limited, in an absolute sense. Berg-Cross (2000) go on to indicate that when a child grows up being physically abused and / or observing severe physical aggression occurring between parents, there is over an 80% chance that the child will not engage in any aggressive acts. Perhaps this undesirable trait is transmitted only to those grown children who are emotionally frustrated, low in coping skills, or in a relationship that allows physical aggression (Berg-Cross, 2000). Other factors may turn out to be even more predictive of who will copy the aggressive behaviour of their parents. Thus, although studies reveal that an individual is more likely to exhibit aggressive acting out behaviour if they observed aggression in the family of origin, Berg-Cross (2000) go on to stress that intergenerational transmission is highly selective, greatly modified by the historical events and societal changes each generation must deal with.

Despite the argument that intergenerational transmission is not guaranteed, the role of the family and its impact on criminal development is also emphasised through the process of socialisation. Socialisation can be defined as a process through which people learn certain attitudes and modes of behaviour, which enable them to participate in the world (Berger, 1976; Pikunas, 1976). As stated in the literature review the notion that criminal behaviour is primarily learnt and conditioned by social factors has been verified by numerous studies. Thus, socialisation then seems to be a concept that is able to explain the influence that social factors have on attitudes and behaviour and is therefore necessary to question the nature of socialisation that occurs in one's family. Pikunas (1976) and Schneider (1976) tend to stress the positive aspects of the socialisation process were they emphasise that children acquire the moral codes, social skills and sex role behaviours necessary for proper functioning in our society from their surrounding environments. While this may be valid, it

is also true that socialisation is responsible for perpetuating criminal behaviour as it can encourage violence, dominance and control as a powerful tool to utilise in order to gain supremacy over others (Pikunas, 1976; Schneider, 1976).

As mentioned previously by Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004), parents are the first people the child comes into contact with, thus the family forms the most significant institution in shaping the child's beliefs, values and attitudes. Many years ago and in support of this, Mead (1934) explained the crucial role of parents and other 'meaningful' adults in terms of 'significant others'. For Mead (1934) the first phases of socialisation are characterised by the child adopting the attitudes and roles of their parents. As the child grows older, they begin to learn that these particular attitudes and roles extend to a much more general reality (Mead, 1934). Mead (1934) provided the example of the little boy who observes his father being both violent and aggressive towards him and his mother, soon realising that this behaviour that takes place in his home can also take place amongst peers at school thus indicating that every 'significant other' also behaves in this manner. It is at this stage that the boy, according to Mead (1934), begins to relate to both a 'significant other' and a generalised other, which represents society at large. The influential nature of 'significant others' behaviour becomes clear when we consider the child's knowledge, high degree of curiosity and receptivity to most forms of stimulation (Sharpe & Litzelfelner, 2004).

Bandura's work (1971; 1965) raises another aspect of learning in the socialisation process, namely, that children learn even when they are not punished or reinforced. Bandura (1971; 1965) argues that children can learn behaviour merely by watching or observing others, specifically if this process takes place within the family - a process referred to as 'modelling'. There are two components, according to Bandura (1971; 1965), of learning through modelling: the first being observational learning - learning new responses from watching the behaviour of another. Second, a person who has already acquired a particular behaviour may become less or more willing to reproduce it by observing the consequences when another engages in it (Bandura, 1971).

Whether they are conscious or even aware of it or not, Pikunas (1976) highlight how the majority of parents act as representatives of their society. They help to further prevailing

norms, and inhibit the development of alternative forms of behaviour (Pikunas, 1976). Prevailing aggressive behaviour becomes ingrained through the childhood activities encouraged or modelled by parents. Children are taught to play with guns, play sport and to engage in activity by themselves if the circumstances warrant it; aggression, physical strength, dominance and independence are thus being fostered (Pikunas, 1976). Another major function of the family, according to McCord (1999), is to act as a disciplining agent. It is the first place where children learn to unquestionably accept authority and hierarchy unquestionably and often these relations are expressed in the father's (male) dominant position over the mother (female), and the child's position via their parents (McCord, 1999). Children are expected to obey their parents even if their commands are unrealistic and their punishment cruel where over one third of subjects in the study conducted by Pikunas (1976) admitted to never being (consciously) angry or questioning their father's or other 'significant adults' authority, even when severely beaten by them. Parental behaviour of this sort is not typical and can have a major impact on the development of aggressive behaviour in their children (McCord, 1999).

Therefore, from this family systems approach, Frick and McKoy (2001) believe that antisocial behaviour may be the result of environmental and traumatic stressors such as residing in dysfunctional families. Kronenberger and Meyer (1996) further this by stating that children reared in these families are subjected to interactional patterns that are dysfunctional and unsupportive – where such family interactions reinforce behaviours according to their consequences.

Despite these findings, Bischof et al (1992) suggest that a dysfunctional family system is not necessarily associated with delinquent behaviour by juveniles. *“It may be that for some types of offenders, sociocultural contexts other than the family (e.g. peer group, mass media, societal norms related to masculinity and aggression) are more influential in the etiology of the offences”* (Bischof et al, 1992, p. 322). This is supported by Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) who state that the deterioration of the family structure has placed socialisation responsibilities upon the school and community – indicating that the school, peer affiliation as well as the broader context have an impact on the individual's development. Thus, the impact of the family on child developmental outcomes varies

according to the amount and nature of the child's contact with other socialisation agents, and to the interaction of the socialisation process occurring in familial and extrafamilial settings (Sharpe & Litzelfelner, 2004).

This is reinforced by Breunlin, Schwartz and Mackune-Karrer (1997) who proposed a developmental lens or metaframework that reintegrates individual development with developmental perspectives on the family and society. Their model includes five levels, namely biological, individual, sub-systemic (relational), familial, and societal. Each level, according to Breunlin et al (1997) affects the other with no requirement of a specific order for growth and development. At the societal level, individuals and families often incorporate values and beliefs of the dominant cultures in which they live (White & Epston, 1990). Due to living in a global community, Gergen (1991) also emphasises how multiple forms of media have a tremendous influence on individual and family experience. The power of the dominant culture on families is similar to the powerful influence parents have on young children (Breunlin et al, 1997). This is supported by Bronfenbrenner (1979) who from an ecological perspective, believes families are nested within communities and children are nested within families. Based upon this idea, Simons et al (2005) have suggested that family processes may mediate much of the effect of community context on children. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1979) has asserted that the embeddedness of the family in its immediate context shapes the strategies of parenting, and the quality of parenting, in turn, shapes child development. Thus, community characteristics are posited to influence child development, at least in part, through their impact on parental behaviour (Simons et al, 2005). Thus, the value of examining the family life cycle can be both remedial (explain behaviour viewed as dysfunction) and preventative (prepare the system for change), but it is important to remember that every family is also in the process of individual, relational and societal development (Breunlin et al, 1997).

This section emphasises that it is not possible to accurately assess an individual's concern without observing the interaction of the other family members, as well as the broader contexts in which the person and the family live (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). Studying the internal dynamics of an individual without adequately considering interpersonal dynamics yields an incomplete picture. Systemic therapists do not deny the

importance of the individual in the family system, but they believe an individual's systemic affiliations and interactions have more power in the person's life. According to Kerr and Bowen (1988), the cause of an individual's problems can be understood only by viewing the role of the family as an emotional unit. Within the family unit, unresolved emotional fusion to one's family must be addressed if one hopes to achieve a mature and unique personality – thus emphasising the importance the family as a system may impact on the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour.

### **2.10.2 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development**

*"We have to recognise where crime begins. We must do more to teach our children the difference between right and wrong... It must start at home. And it must also be taught in our schools... Above all, it must be taught by example"* (Howard, 1993 as cited in Mooney, 1998, p. 213). Smith (2006) emphasises how trust in relationships is dependent on the quality of attachment and relationships within family units. These, according to Smith (2006) are the building blocks of morals, values, functional relationships and healthy decision-making in later life. In addition Smith (2006) highlights awareness of the causes and, more importantly, the consequences of family fragmentation, domestic violence and lack of parental supervision. Thus to conceptualise another way that criminal behaviour begins to develop, emphasis is placed on the family and its moral coding utilising the context of *Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development*. How the family specifically relates to the development of morals and values will be discussed and then the levels of Kohlberg's moral development, namely pre-conventional and conventional levels will be defined as they specifically apply to the juvenile offending population. Due to the post-conventional level only being reached by a majority of adults (Kohlberg, 1975), it will not be discussed as it does not have any relevance within the constraints of this research. Lastly, research on moral reasoning and antisocial behaviour will be explored and focus will be placed on the influence of the family and attachment in moral development as it is believed to make a contribution towards the understanding of juvenile offending behaviour.

Moral development can be defined as *"the process by which children acquire society's standards of right and wrong"* (Davidson & Youniss, 1995, p. 121). This is further elaborated by Kohlberg (1981) who states that moral development is the process in which

children develop proper attitudes and behaviours toward individuals that occupy society, based on familial, social as well as cultural norms, rules and laws. Kohlberg (1981) additionally predicted that once an individual has developed a form of moral reasoning, they could be expected to apply these ways of thinking or sets of moral principles to all moral conflicts. Implicit in this definition, Davidson and Youniss (1995) point out that it is the idea that morally mature individuals do not submit to society's dictates because they expect tangible rewards for complying, or fear of punishment for transgressing. Rather, they have internalised the moral principle they have learned and will conform to these ideals, even when authority figures are not present to enforce them (Davidson & Youniss, 1995).

According to Westen (1999) changes in moral reasoning stem from a change in the way that one thinks (i.e. in cognitive structures, which are shaped progressively over development and which are impacted upon by environmental influences, such as the family). This is further supported by Ferns and Thom (2001) who state that morality is not a product of a single psychological process – it is rather a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that requires the integration of several psychological developmental components (i.e. cognitive, social and personality components of the human being, all which may be influenced by the family and its processes). Furthermore, Ferns and Thom (2001) go on to illustrate how such intrapsychic development should be seen in the light of the historical and socio-cultural context within which it takes place – contexts in which the family plays a vital role. Moral development, according to Kohlberg (1981) is the primary concern of the parent, and thus the family. Teaching a child to distinguish right from wrong and to behave accordingly is a goal of parenting and thus a process that begins to take place in the individual's direct family, however later extends to other socialising agents (Kohlberg, 1981).

According to Kohlberg (1975), the sequence of moral development consists of six stages ordered into three levels – the pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional levels of moral orientation. The pre-conventional moral level, as highlighted by Kohlberg (1975), is characteristic of most children under the age of ten, some adolescents, and numerous delinquents and adult criminal offenders. Kohlberg (1975) goes on to describe the

conventional level as that which is achieved by the majority of adolescents and adults in nearly all societies. Finally, the post-conventional level is only believed to be reached by a minority of adults (Kohlberg, 1975).

When looking at these stages individually, Kohlberg (1963) describes how the pre-conventional level of moral development which occurs between the ages of four and ten, is characterised by a child's responsiveness to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right and wrong, interpreting these labels in terms of either the physical consequences for disobeying them or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels of good and bad. Furthermore, in this stage, Kohlberg (1963) illustrates how right actions consist of those which instrumentally satisfy the individual's own needs and occasionally the needs of others – an attribute that may be seen in juvenile offenders. Moral development at this stage, according to Crittenden (1990) is dependent on participation in the family and other social institutions within each culture. Due to the findings in a variety of studies which state that juvenile offenders are generally exposed to inconsistent disciplinary methods within the family (Mercy et al, 2002), it leads one to question how such unpredictable methods of discipline impact on their moral development due to them being unable to distinguish between what is good and bad or right and wrong behaviour. This is supported by Crittenden (1990) who states that the democratic family and school systems are more likely to promote the development of internal self-controls and moral growth than are authoritarian or permissive systems which are found in the family lives of these juvenile offenders.

Crittenden (1990) go on to indicate how permissive systems fail to instil any controls, while authoritarian systems instil only fear of punishment, which is not an effective deterrent unless there is a real chance of being caught or punishment becomes a reward because it brings attention to the offender. This information, which is supported by the findings in previous literature mentioned in the family functioning section, states that true moral behaviour involves a number of internal processes that are best developed through warm, caring parenting with clear and consistent expectations, and places emphasis on the reinforcement of positive behaviours rather than the punishment of negative ones, modelling of moral behaviour by adults, and creation of opportunities for the child to

practice moral reasoning and actions (Crittenden, 1990). This demonstrates the impact the family has on the individual, and how disrupting the adequate process of moral development may impact on the development of juvenile offending behaviour.

In the conventional level of moral development – the level which is dominant from pre-adolescence (14 – 22 years) – there is a move to a cognitive recognition that groups, group practices and group rules have important values (Kohlberg, 1963). Thus, as highlighted by Kohlberg (1981; 1963), they are being able to define what is right by the standards they have learned from other people, particularly from authorities they deem respectful such as the family, peer groups, teams, school or church – thus doing what is expected by people that they consider close to themselves. Additionally, the conventional level, according to Westen (1999), involves a move away from evaluation of actions primarily in terms of consequences, and instead they justify their choice of moral actions on the basis of their aspiration to gain the approval or avoid the disapproval of others and begin to understand the concepts of trust, loyalty and gratitude. Kohlberg (1963) highlights how tangible rewards and punishments as motivators of ethical codes have been replaced with social praise and the avoidance of blame. According to Kohlberg (1963) individuals who reason at this stage, right behaviour consists of performing one's duty, showing respect for authority and maintaining the given social order for its own sake. Laws always take precedence over and above the individual's special or personal interests (Kohlberg, 1963).

The cognitive determinant at the conventional level is described by Duska (1997) as 'role taking' or 'empathising'. Furthermore, Duska (1997) as well as Kohlberg (1963) describes how an individual at this level has the ability to put themselves in the mind and place of another individual; seeing things from their point of view – realising the limitations of egoism and identifying the need for group cooperation. Thus, it is important to note that Kohlberg (1963) implied that relevant social experiences which involve the exposure to individuals or situations that force a re-evaluation of one's current moral concepts are necessary before children can progress from the pre-conventional level of morality to Kohlberg's higher stages. Thus acquisition of conventional stage moral reasoning is dependent on social mediation which is linked to environmental influences such as the family and relative deprivation (Kohlberg, 1963).

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998) believe that criminals have manufactured an internal morality appropriate only to their own survival - thus indicating the egocentricity of their functioning. This gross desensitisation to committing a variety of criminal acts and the lack of empathy and compassion expressed by these individuals is suggested by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998) to result in the total collapse of the boundaries between good and bad in the lives of these youth. The capacity to distinguish between these two states of being has been nullified through their gross exposure to problematic family environments or societies full of violence, and their participation in criminal activity (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1998).

Thus, in instances where Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning has been applied as an explanation for criminal or delinquent behaviour, Moffit, Caspi, Harrington and Milne (2002), Aleixo and Norris (2000) as well as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) exemplify how delinquents have been found to exhibit a lower level of moral development, generally being identified as functioning in the pre-conventional level. In research conducted by Blasi (1980) as cited in Mbhele (2003) along with findings from Moffit et al (2002), it was found that delinquents lagged behind non-delinquents and tended to get "stuck" in a state of moral immaturity. Thus it can be said that delinquents *"tend to define right and wrong largely in absolute terms, focus almost entirely on external consequences, act to avoid punishment, and show little concern for the feelings of others"* (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994, p. 137).

Mbhele (2003) describes how Kohlberg argued that the relationship between moral reasoning and moral behaviour is far from simple. This is due to the fact that it has been found that even though many juvenile offenders reason at the pre-conventional level, a fair number of them reason at a conventional level but break the law anyway (Gavaghan, Arnold & Gibbs, 1983 as cited in Mbhele, 2003). This suggests, as highlighted by Mbhele (2003), that there must be personal qualities other than one's level of moral reasoning, as well as many situational factors such as the family, which may influence a person's moral conduct on a daily basis. Whilst this cautioning about what can be inferred from examples of hypothetical reasoning is important, it should not invalidate possible links between

behaviour and levels of moral appreciation. Part of the motivation for the present study was an attempt to understand what perceptions these youth have of their families as influential factors in the development of their aggressive behaviour and how it possibly prohibited the development of adequate morals, rules and societal norms.

Often the primary family is separated for instance due to parental transitions or due to working conditions resulting in the severance of the mother and father, thus resulting in the transfer of values and norms being hampered. This may have, as highlighted by Ferns and Thom (2001) resulted in a lack of positive role models. According to Bandura and Walters as cited in Ferns and Thom (2001) role models are necessary for acquiring patterns of human behaviour and moral values and norms upheld by society. Thus their values may have been corrupted since there was a sense of injustice and arbitrary reward and punishment within some of these family systems (Ferns & Thom, 2001). This may also be impacted on through the effects of familial violence on the individual. Gill Stryker as cited in Ferns and Thom (2001) noted that the conflictual family context may allow for common fantasies of aggression to be informed by knowledge. It is important to note however, that although the family is the primary context in which morals and values begin to develop – it also is impacted on by other social factors (i.e. community violence, deviant peer groups, and thus one may not attribute the failure of moral development to be the solitary influence of the family).

Rutter and Giller (1984) also place focus on moral development and attachment believing that the emotional connection that occurs within the family has an impact on the individuals development of morality and that disruptions in this regard may create cycles of criminal behaviour. In a variety of studies conducted by Rutter and Giller (1984), they made various clinical observations as well as obtained information that illustrated how many criminal offenders reported having grown up with inconsistent parenting and some reflecting extensive histories of physical or sexual abuse. This leads one to question what are the familial influences on the development of morality that could possibly lead to the formation of criminal behaviour.

In conclusion, it is evidenced that majority of juvenile offenders function on the lower level of moral development, indicating an inability to develop empathy or concern for others. Morality can be a natural and unfolding phenomenon when nurtured by the environment, and thus indicating that families at risk need support in order for children to develop a healthy moral core or else it may lead to the development of a criminal pathway. This is reinforced by Bronfenbrenner (1979) who states that without the support of the family, the child's development cannot work, and consequences detrimental.

Despite these findings, one has to acknowledge that Kohlberg's theory of moral development and its influence on criminal behaviour was one of many moral theory's and thus according to Mbhele (2003) is not conclusive in its entirety. Furthermore, Regoli and Hewitt (1994) indicate how all moral theories assume that human behaviour is morally based. *"It does not allow for instinctual behaviour nor is it able to explain that some behaviour may be a spontaneous reaction to frustration. The basic aggressiveness of many people may require a somewhat different explanation than what theories of moral development provide"* (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994, p. 138). Thus, moral truncation is not necessarily the only influence on the development of antisocial behaviour, as other aspects such as genetic, biological, socialisation, behavioural and systemic approaches can also be viewed as theoretical models that impact on ones involvement in offending activities. Additionally, the impact of the family on moral developmental outcomes varies according to the amount and nature of the child's contact with other socialisation agents, and to the interaction of socialisation processes occurring in familial as well as extrafamilial settings (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994).

## **2.11 SUMMARY**

There is no psychologically viable theory of personality and behaviour that, according to Saradjian (1996), denies the influence of experience, particularly early experience. *"Everything that a person comes to know and believe about the self, about others, and about the world, comes from the history of their interactions with their environment and, more importantly, with the people within it. Although this process is continuous throughout life, and is dynamic and reflexive, the building blocks of the process are laid in childhood and, unless reassembled, become the foundations upon which the rest of the*

*personality is built*" (Saradjian, 1996, p. 39). This chapter aimed to look at various aspects of the family as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile offending behaviour. It looked at both quantitative as well as qualitative perceptions of how the family may impact on a child's development and aimed to ascertain whether any particular set of building blocks (particularly, the family structure, family functioning, family emotional expression and responsiveness as well family trauma) were laid that could be the foundation from which a child would get involved in offending behaviour.

Thus, when looking at the above literature which pertains to how the family may be seen as a contributing factor in the development of juvenile offending behaviour; the following section looks at the research method which was utilised in this specific study to gather information from delinquent's in order to substantiate or differentiate from the findings above and specifically establish how they perceive their families to have impacted on their antisocial behaviour.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Mooney (1998) illustrates how numerous studies have been conducted in the investigation of family characteristics and delinquent behaviour – majority of these studies suffering from severe methodological weaknesses. The typical strategy used in these studies has been a natural-scientific approach which compares the families of delinquents with families of nondelinquents (Mooney, 1998). When taking a natural-scientific approach, one is restricted to conducting research that can be observed and measured objectively, therefore restricting the expression of an individual's perceptions, experiences, feelings and opinions. Using such an approach, according to Mouton (2001), lacks depth and insider perspective which may lead to 'surface level' analysis, something that this study did not aim to do and therefore a qualitative method of gathering data was utilised. One of the major distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research, according to Mouton (2001), is the fact that the researcher attempted to understand people in terms of their own definitions of their world – the focus being on the insider-perspective as opposed to the outsider-perspective – and thus giving one an in-depth account, insight and a richer content as well as understanding into the life-worlds of these individuals. As Mooney (1998) states; delinquents do not present themselves as a homogenous group for research purposes and each family is considered to have their own particular 'personality' and therefore are not thought of as a single group that share similar characteristics. Utilising a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to identify the similarities and differences that occurred in each family. Additionally, this was considered as a useful tool to build rapport with the participants before one attempted to unpack the way these individuals relate to the world (Mouton, 2001).

Although qualitative research is sometimes criticised for being subjective and uncontrolled (Mouton, 2001), it is important to note that themes explored in the study were directed by literature rather than the researcher, where additional topics were introduced by the participants. Furthermore, according to Mouton (2001), qualitative research is seen to have a lack of criteria by which to judge the trustworthiness and relevance of the results and thus the proposed study acknowledged that, given the nature and size of the study, the truth of

results would not stand for itself but would rely on further research for validation. Despite this, qualitative research has numerous benefits.

These positive aspects of qualitative research were demonstrated in a study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998), individuals committed of a criminal offence revealed how enthusiastic they were to share their information and how grateful they were for the opportunity to disclose their life stories and to be heard. While the voices in this study do not present us with the answers, they do frame the problem in a more complex way and lend insight into how one may have to approach solutions in the fight against crime. Indeed, according to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998), it is a firm belief that education programmes geared to fight crime can only succeed if they take into account the worldviews of the people they attempt to reach. Thus, the importance of asking young people personally about their feelings towards crime can be seen as a way of creating anti-crime messages as the government needs to sit down with these youth in order to establish what is bothering them. Thus this study utilised a qualitative method in order to establish what was hassling these youth, focusing particularly on the kinds of choices that led to these perpetrators committing crimes and the ways in which they perceived their actions.

Particularly, in utilising a qualitative approach, this research attempted to understand the juvenile offender's experiences within their families and how they constructed themselves from a subjective, detailed and holistic perspective. The importance of gaining subjective opinions of these offenders is extremely relevant as no consistency exists about what constitutes a positive or negative family and thus obtaining perceptions and experiences from these participants allows one to understand their impressions of their family and what characteristics from this social unit impacted upon them. This provides valuable insight in their different experiences and the different families they encounter and thus, as highlighted by Mouton (2001), points out the complexities, richness and diversity of their lives that can only be captured by them having described what they perceived to be happening in their everyday lives as children which are seldom seen or heard, incorporating the context in which they operated, as well as their frame of reference.

Besides this, one would also have to describe it as exploratory research. “*Exploratory research does not start with a specific problem – the approach of such a study is to find a problem or hypothesis to be tested*” (Welman & Kruger, 2002, p. 12). In other words, the researcher entered into the situation and aimed to explore the participant’s perceptions, experiences, feelings and emotions, and from this established whether any common pattern or key issues arose with specific focus being placed on the family’s structure, its functioning, the ability to express emotions as well as the presence of family trauma.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE**

#### **3.2.1 Research Questions:**

Based on the aims of the proposed study, specific research questions were posed:

- How do juvenile offenders perceive and experience their family as a potential factor that led to the development of their criminal behaviour?
- How do juvenile offenders perceive the structure of their family and its impact on the development of their juvenile offending behaviour?
- How do juvenile offenders perceive the functioning of their family and its impact on the development of their juvenile offending behaviour?
- What is the juvenile offender’s experience of the way in which the family expresses and responds emotionally and how do they perceive this as having an impact on the development of their juvenile offending behaviour?
- How do juvenile offenders perceive their experience of a family trauma and its influence on the development of their juvenile offending behaviour?

#### **3.2.2 Participants :**

Essentially, the data was collected from a specific group of adolescent males defined as juvenile offenders between the ages of 15 and 21 years, who had come into contact with the Criminal Justice System on their first offence but rather than being sentenced to prison for committing the crime, they had been diverted into a diversion programme. The juvenile offenders were considered first time offenders as they had not been adjudicated of a crime prior to the current adjudication. Their antisocial acts ranged from illegal use of substances, gang involvement, house breaking, theft, fighting with the result of grievous

bodily harm, vandalism of property and sexual offences. They ranged in race as some were coloured and others were black, however all had the same ethnicity as they all originated from a South African background and upbringing. All of these participants resided in lower socioeconomic areas as majority of them lived in townships or poverty-stricken areas.

As mentioned previously, these offenders had only been convicted of one crime and thus it was their first encounter with the criminal justice system. First time offenders were chosen in an attempt to limit the development of a 'master narrative' that could possibly invalidate the results of the study. According to Schiffrin (1996) a master narrative entails "*telling a story that allows us to create a 'story world' in which we can represent ourselves against a backdrop of cultural expectations about a typical course of action; our identities as social beings emerge as we construct our own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social and cultural expectations*" (p. 170). It is important to note that all individuals have a certain master narrative, and the researcher took this into account at all times. Furthermore, juvenile offenders that were diverted into a diversion programme (rather than being imprisoned) were less likely to have developed an extreme master narrative with regard to their family lives. This seemed to coincide with the research findings. This resulted in these juvenile offenders in the diversion programmes giving a more transparent account of their family lives rather than those who have already been imprisoned.

In particular the researcher utilised the purposive sampling method where the researcher selected an intentional population of juvenile offenders as this method is utilised by "*researchers who rely on experience, ingenuity, and/or previous research findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a manner that the sample they obtain may be regarded as being representative of the relative population*" (Welman & Kruger, 2002, p. 63). In doing purposive sampling, the researcher obtained participants and accumulated data from an organisation that had already isolated the problem area that one set out to study for the intention of this research, namely juvenile offenders that were redirected to a diversion programme with Khulisa and SPARK – a programme run in affiliation with the Teddy Bear Clinic. However, there were other factors that characterised the sample. The

fact that these juvenile offenders had already been placed in a diversion programme where they had access to psychological, social and educational programmes suggested psychological characteristics that differentiate from the general population who may be still in the process of committing criminal acts outside of such a programme. There were also characteristics, according to Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) that are advocated as being more prominent in a volunteer sample than in the general population such as the tendency to be more sociable and to have a higher need to acquire social approval. These sample characteristics were not, however, considered problematic due to qualitative research not being concerned with making general claims about the phenomenon that was investigated. Rather it aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of juvenile delinquents in an in-depth manner and how they view their family as an influential factor in the development of their offending behaviour in order to better understand their participation in criminal activities. A sample size of 11 was believed to be sufficient for such detailed investigation.

### **3.2.3 Procedure:**

The researcher was working with an organisation that provides diversion services to juvenile offenders in conflict with the law (i.e. Khulisa and SPARK). These are already pre-existing organisations within the Criminal Justice System, which were identified by the researcher as organisations that particularly provide diversion programmes to youth that have committed a criminal offence.

To gain access to the volunteers, the researcher contacted Khulisa and SPARK and informed them about the nature of the study. Once approval was obtained from these organisations, with the assistance of the key members of these associations and the juvenile's records, the researcher, along with the aim of the study, was introduced to the male juvenile offenders. These delinquents were members of the diversion programme within these organisations and were between the ages of 15 – 21 according to the Department of Correctional Services (1997), and were identified as first time offenders. These individuals were approached and invited to take place in the study. They were provided with an information sheet explaining the nature and purpose of the study and what was required of them as participants (i.e. to complete an interview which was tape-recorded). From here, these delinquents were enabled to approach the researcher on a

voluntary basis according to their own free will to participate. Those individuals willing to participate in the study were given two consent forms to fill out. These comprised of a consent form for participation as well as one allowing the recording of the interview. For those who were under the age of 18, they were given a consent form in which they had to receive informed consent from their legal guardians to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by the interviewer, who is also the researcher. One is aware that inquiring about an individual's life is an invasion of their privacy, and each individual participant was notified that confidentiality was guaranteed at all times and that if any question posed to be too personal, they were free to withdraw from the study or not answer the question concerned.

As this is a qualitative study and attention is being directed towards the experience and perceptions of these specific juvenile offenders and the overall impact that their family has had on their lives, much attention was not placed on the quantity of participants. One had 11 first time juvenile offenders that had been referred to participate in a diversion programme in Khulisa and SPARK, and completed the study with the permission of this organisation, themselves and their legal guardians (where the boys were under the age of 18). Factors like the participant's availability were taken into consideration for when the interviews could be conducted.

The juvenile offenders had to be first time offenders which had come into contact with the Criminal Justice System and as a result had been placed in a diversion programme within the organisations of Khulisa and SPARK. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was not to generalise the findings to the entire population from which the participants were drawn, but to decipher the relevance of this study to another population believed to be similar.

#### **3.2.4 Data Collection Method :**

Due to the aim of the research being to unearth and discover the subjective, experiential dimension of juvenile delinquents view of their family influence on the development of their antisocial behaviour, Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994) suggested that the investigation of complex phenomena best be served by an interview process which provides access to subjective meaning. Thus, the most advantageous research tool that was

utilised in this study was that of semi-structured and in-depth interviews, which were conducted with each participant from the group of juvenile offenders. An interview is defined by Berg (1995), as a “*conversation with a purpose*” (p. 29). The ‘purpose’ referring to the gathering of data. According to Welman and Kruger (2002), these interviews are usually employed in explorative research to identify important variables in a particular area; to formulate penetrating questions on them; and to generate hypotheses for further investigation. The data of this study therefore comprised of written texts of recorded interviews.

The exploratory nature of the study dictated that an interview schedule be drawn up by the researcher, rather than making use of a standardised questionnaire (The questions in the interview schedule can be found in Appendix H). However, questions emerged from the researcher’s investigation into relevant literature. The interview schedule consisted of 15 open-ended questions with the first section exploring the participant’s experience of their family and the remainder of the interview schedule involved questions pertaining to their family structure, functioning, emotional expression and responsiveness as well as the experience of family trauma. The structure of the questions was uniform across the interviews, due to having an interview schedule that followed in a logical progression. Questions were open-ended in an attempt to prevent leading the participant into answering in a manner that the researcher wished or to have subjected them to any preconceived notions.

The interviews were conducted in the organisation of Khulisa and SPARK with juvenile offenders who had been diverted away from being imprisoned and placed within a diversion programme. One attempted to make the environment as comfortable as possible, and thus covered the following areas: biographical data, details of the juvenile offender’s behaviours, as well as their experiences and perceptions of how their families may have influenced the development of their criminal behaviour. This specifically focused on their experiences and perceptions of the family structure, its functioning, the families’ emotional expression and responsiveness as well exposure to family trauma. Thus, the focus of the interview was already predetermined. However, the semi-structured approach allowed the interviewee to speak freely and in this allowed for new and unexpected information to be

revealed. Therefore, according to Banister et al (1994), the semi-structured approach permits a flexible exploration of the subject matter within the discussion and thus allows for a more systemic and comprehensive interviewing of the topic.

Furthermore, this data was gathered by recording the interviews on an audiotape recorder with permission from the participants and where necessary, their legal guardians, as well as small notes being taken (See ethical section with regard to ethical issues surrounding confidentiality, anonymity and disclosure of criminal activities). At the close of each interview the researcher made notes concerning the interactional aspects and observations during the interview (Banister et al, 1994). Once this information had been gathered, it was transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and the resulting data was analysed. Transcriptions were limited to the verbatim report of utterances as far as possible, and included dimensions such as strong emphasis, significant pauses, interruptions and overlaps in speech exchange. This method, according to Banister et al (1994) is a recommendation for a typical psychological interview transcription. Both the interviewer's and interviewee's speech were recorded and transcribed into written text.

The respondent was required to complete the interview, all of which involved relatively long and descriptive answers. The interview took place from 30 minutes up to 55 minutes at maximum, but this also depended on the amount of information the individual chose and was willing to divulge.

### **3.2.5 Data Analysis :**

The aim here was to get various participants from a range of juvenile offenders (not necessarily from the same cultural background or in having committed the same criminal offence). From the data gathered one looked for the general and similar patterns or differences that existed between these participants within this particular group of juvenile offenders. In the end one was able to observe whether the family was considered as a contributing factor in the development of juvenile behaviour, and on the other hand, established whether the family was perceived as an influencing factor that may contribute towards the development of juvenile offending behaviour.

This gathered data was analysed by using thematic content analysis which took an interpretive stance. Thematic content analysis has become a commonly accepted qualitative technique within the social sciences and has been utilised in numerous psychological studies (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1996; Krippendorff, 1980; Holsti, 1969). Furthermore, thematic content analysis is a tool which aims to “*provide knowledge, insights, a representation of ‘facts’, and a practical guide to action*” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 21). Thematic content analysis was therefore used as a research technique that, according to Weber (1985), utilises a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text and consequently reduces and categorises a large volume of material into more meaningful units from which interpretations and inferences can be made.

The first stage of analysis was directed by a number of commonly accepted procedural steps, which were applied to the manifest content of the text. Due to the data analysis being based on the full interview texts, the researcher coded the content data into various themes. Coding is a process whereby “*raw data is systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise descriptions of relevant content characteristics*” (Holsti, 1969, p. 95). The process of analysing the data as well as creating and applying a coding scheme involved following several fundamental steps which have been highlighted by Weber (1985) as well as Krippendorff (1980):

- 1) The recording units were specified (i.e. whether the focus is upon words, sentences or themes). The analysis in this case was based upon the identification of thematic units, comprising a sentence, statement or group of statements about a particular topic. These thematic units were determined in terms of their logical coherence around a specific topic based in the literature. For example, the evaluation of how the structure of the family was perceived to have influenced the juvenile delinquent criminal acts. This topic was broken down, based on the literature and information volunteered by the participants, into the thematic units of single-headed households, deprived of adequate resources, displaced living situations etc.
- 2) The categories of analysis were defined prior to the interviews being conducted. The analytic categories of this study were initially guided by the theory covered in the

literature, which provided a conceptual base for the identification of thematic categories. Thus, the researcher decided that each category would be mutually exclusive. Secondly, it was ascertained that the categories would be relatively narrow and thus for example focusing on specific aspects that were related to the families' structure such as living with alternative family members due to problematic socioeconomic conditions.

- 3) Additionally, the clarification of categories further involved in-depth reading of transcripts in order to identify aspects of the text that have not been encompassed in the literature. It is accepted by Banister et al (1994) that analytic categories can be both theory and data derived. Considering the explorative nature of the study, Banister et al (1994) places emphasis on the combination of deductive and inductive analysis and thus allowing for the establishment of new categories remaining open to the possibility that the data might generate new insights and theory.
- 4) Following this, the interviews were coded in their entirety, identifying any thematic recording units that had relevance for the subject matter of the study. New generic categories were constructed where necessary. It was the researcher's endeavour to ensure that the analysis was as inclusive and widespread as possible. Once a new category was discovered, all scripts were re-examined for evidence of similar arising themes. This process continued until no further information could be gleaned.
- 5) Each interview text was systematically coded according to this above mentioned framework.

It is important to note that the data was coded with the use of different colour markers. In other words, if a similar theme arose in the data, presenting the same information – it was coded in a certain colour (i.e. the juvenile's witness to violence within the family environment was colour coded in orange). Each different theme that arose was attached to a different colour coded marker. Thus, each different colour highlighted a different theme that became apparent within all data that had been gathered, thus allowing the researcher to

identify certain aspects of the family that may have influenced or contributed to the development of juvenile offending behaviour.

Furthermore, as the researcher began to identify the various themes that arose, these themes were interpreted through taking the social context of the juvenile delinquent into account (i.e. the themes that arose needed to be described as well as interpreted in relation to the juvenile offenders' social context). Through taking more of an interpretive stance, it allowed the researcher to identify what the juvenile offender's perceptions and experiences of their family were, at a deeper level of understanding.

### **3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The first essential ethical step in this research was to receive permission from these organisations to have contact with these juvenile offenders that were present within their existing diversion programmes. These organisations were Khulisa and SPARK. It was also important to gain informed consent from these organisations as well as from each and every individual participant and their legal guardians (if the boys were under the age of 18) before the study could commence, thus ensuring that their participation was entirely voluntary. Those willing to partake were asked to contact the researcher or the key member of the organisation, ensuring that their participation was in fact voluntary. In conjunction to this, the researcher was cognisant of the ethical concerns posed in working with human subjects in general, and in particular with these participants who had to confront a sensitive topic in their lives and may be traumatised. The interviewees (i.e. participants) had full knowledge of what the study was about and what their input entailed before the research could commence and so that they were able to make an informed decision about participating. Only at the point of interview were participants requested to give consent. It was essential that participants were made aware that this interview may be a painful recollection of anger, embarrassment, and may even prove to be distressing and thus guarantees of confidentiality as well as rights to refuse to participate in the process or to answer a specific question were extended to the interviewees.

Informants were given the right to remain anonymous, however within this study, the collection of the data by tape recording and note taking which was collected by means of a

face-to-face interview could not guarantee that anonymity would be maintained. Therefore the participants were made aware that no real names would be used and further were made to understand the workings of such devices and were given the ability to be free to reject them if they so wished. When all participants accepted them, the results obtained were in harmony with the informant's right to welfare, dignity and privacy. The American Psychological Association (2002) states that psychologists maintain confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of records under their control, whether these are written, automated, or in any other medium. Therefore in this study, the participant was made aware that once raw data had been obtained, transcribed and analysed that the material used for this purpose was ultimately destroyed (Tape cassettes were erased and notes were discarded of). It is important to note that whilst the research was being completed, the tapes and transcripts were kept in a secure place by the researcher and only the researcher and supervisor, a clinical psychologist, had access to these recordings.

On the other hand, principles of confidentiality, according to Mouton (2001) refer to the information gathered from the participants, and therefore they were made aware that the information they revealed could have identified them as the results were recorded verbatim and thus confidentiality may not be guaranteed. In order to anticipate these potential threats to confidentiality, if any possible identifying details arose within the text, alterations were made to prevent this, therefore removing any possible identifiers as well as utilising pseudonyms rather than participant's names. These issues, including possible publication of findings were discussed with each interviewee at the onset of research before any interviewing began to take place.

It is important to note, that due to the researcher dealing with a vulnerable population, various ethical principles had to be taken into account. If the participants were to reveal aspects of their criminal activity, legally the researcher was bound to reveal such content. However, this research was not dealing with or aiming to explore the aspects of their criminal activity, and therefore the integrity of the research process was maintained, as was confidentiality, unless the individual revealed that a violent crime that may have harmed themselves or others was in the process of being committed. If this were to occur, the researcher was bound from an ethical perspective to inform the relevant authorities, and the

participants were informed of this possibility before the study commenced. However, no such happenings took place.

It was anticipated that this was a sensitive topic to these juvenile offenders and certain questions may have proved to be emotionally distressing to participants. Thus the interviews were handled in an extremely sensitive manner, and thus questions were asked in a gentle and caring approach. However, the process of effective interviewing was researched to ensure that questions were appropriately phrased and did not use double-barrelled or leading questions as well ensured that complex psychological jargon was not utilised. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, the participants were informed that they have a right not to continue with the interview or not to answer a particular question. The participants were individually ensured that nothing negative would occur if they chose not to participate or withdraw from the study. If at any point, the participants revealed information that was upsetting or troubling, the researcher debriefed this with the participant ensuring that no personal harm had been done. In addition to this, if an individual participant experienced emotional distress, the individual was referred to the relevant psychologist/counsellor working within the organisations of Khulisa and SPARK. Permission was obtained from the relevant psychologists and/or counsellors to assist before data collection began to take place.

The participants were also informed that the results of the study would be in the form of a printed copy of the dissertation which was made available to the University of the Witwatersrand's Psychology Department. Importantly, one informed the participant that due to the organisations of Khulisa and SPARK having provided the researcher with the sample of participants, the organisations may be aware of which individuals participated in the study. Therefore a brief report that outlined the basic findings of the study was provided to these organisations to prevent any incriminating information being held against the individual participant or the organisation. If the participants wished to do so, they could gain access to it through the relevant members of their organisation. It was also important to inform the participant that the results of this study may be published in a possible journal article. All this was achieved by the participant signing an informed consent letter to which both they and the researcher strictly abided by.

The above chapter illustrates how the participants were obtained and the method utilised to both gather and analyse the data. The following chapter goes on to reveal the findings that were elicited from this research method of thematic content analysis and consequently provides an in-depth understanding of these juvenile delinquents perceptions of their families and their subsequent development of antisocial behaviour.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Crime and violent acts, according to Mkhondo (2005) as well as Mercy et al (2002), has had a devastating impact worldwide and in particular, in South Africa where its prevalence is continuing to rise. This increasing rate of criminal behaviour committed by young people has become a dilemma of such magnitude that it is now seen as a community problem where all citizens are required to get involved in attempting to reduce the violent conduct in the country. With no feasible cause in the development of criminal behaviour, Mkhondo (2005) states that the focus on reductions in risk behaviour seems a viable way to overturn this epidemic. Despite widespread and long-term efforts that have been put in place to understand the extent to which young South Africans are at risk of becoming involved in crime, and the factors that lead them to this path, violent acts and criminal behaviour continue to remain rampant among the youth in South Africa (Mkhondo, 2005). Although Dahlberg and Krug (2002) highlight that there is no single factor that explicates the development of criminal behaviour in our youth, Mercy et al (2002) as well as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) believe that the family could actually form a breeding ground in the development of delinquent offending behaviour. It is therefore imperative to understand juvenile males' perceptions of their families and how they deem this social unit as having an impact on their criminal behaviour. In doing this one hopes that this would assist in tracking family trends and risk perception so that it could be ascertained whether any particular set of building blocks which were laid within the family environment with a view of curbing these factors before the criminal life path becomes well-established.

This chapter will provide an overview of these emerging themes as well as a reflective section from the perspective of the researcher. Moreover, a systematic account of the results obtained from the study and their qualitative thematic content analyses will be provided. Additionally, this chapter further aims to provide a discussion on the results that were obtained in the present study. The chapter is divided into sections based on pre-determined categories of analysis which is presented in the form of themes as well as sub-themes that emerged from the raw data and the analysis. The transcripts have been analysed in their entirety, however, only certain quotes have been presented in the analysis.

These quotes have been selected as they were believed to be representative of the themes introduced whilst quotes of a redundant nature were excluded from the chapter (Banister et al, 1994). When quoting, abbreviations were utilised, for example participant one was referred to as P1.

Results of this thematic content analysis qualitative research method both supported as well as deviated from the research questions, demonstrating that the information provided in this section does not purport to be an empirical representation of youth offending, but it does provide an indication of certain family dynamics related to offending behaviour. Thus, three major themes pertaining to the predominant perceptions of how the family influenced the juvenile delinquent's antisocial behaviour are discussed critically in comparison to previous research findings. Based on the discussions that emerged from the individual interviews it was evident that there were certain perceptions around the families influence on their criminal behaviour as well as other influencing factors that arose from the participants. Most noticeable in this regard were the topics of the different family forms that presented within these delinquent's settings, the dysfunctional family relationships, patterns and response styles, and the family's level of emotional involvement. However, despite the family being seen as an influencing factor these participants also identified other variables as contributing the formation of their antisocial behaviour and thus these areas of contestation are highlighted throughout these sections. These broad findings will be presented separately in the analysis to follow.

## **4.2 REFLEXIVITY**

Prior to commencing with the findings and discussion, it is believed necessary to provide the reader with impressions gained by the researcher during the interviews. The aim being to provide one with a contextualisation of the participants which will aid in enhancing the analysis which follows this section. This is due to the belief of Eichleberger (1989) who states that in qualitative research the researcher must take into consideration that they are constructing the reality on the basis of their interpretations of data with the assistance of participants who provided the data. It is thus deemed valuable, according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002), for readers and the researcher alike to acknowledge the perspective as well as the situational context from which the researcher described and interpreted as

they cannot be considered as entirely indifferent to the outcomes of the research. Furthermore, in the context of this research, several dimensions of the research process needed to be deliberated upon in order to understand the manner in which participants interacted in the individual interviews and what information they shared as well as how it was divulged.

#### **4.2.1 Talking to a white adult psychologist**

It is important to draw attention to the demographics and active presence of the researcher who comprised of an adult white female who was affiliated with the associations of Khulisa and SPARK – such characteristics which may have possibly impacted on the contributions of the participants. Their responses and participation may have been further impacted upon when introducing oneself as a psychologist and thus allowing herself to respond to interviewees in a specific manner and illustrating specific emotions. Rubin and Rubin (2005) demonstrate this through the description of response bias which tends to take place when the respondent's answers may be impacted upon by his or her reaction to the interviewer's gender, appearance or age. It can thus be speculated that being an adult white female interviewer and psychologist may have brought about certain biases in the types of responses that the participants gave. This may have been further impacted upon as the researcher was associated as working as a psychologist with the diversion programmes in which these delinquents had been placed, and such associations with people in an authoritative position may have elicited particular responses from these individuals.

Thus, although all participants were receptive to being interviewed, a vast majority of the individuals displayed caution as they were experienced as guarded and appeared to minimise the negative aspects of their family situations. It is assumed that these individuals perceived themselves to be under scrutiny of the court to perform adequately in these diversion programmes and thus aim to win the programmes approval to assist in their future sentencing. As an adult white female psychologist within this environment one can presuppose that these individuals believed the interviewer to be affiliated in this decision making process as one was often referred to as an authority figure. Thus, participants may have aimed to portray themselves as well as their families in a positive and favourable light

in order to avoid blame and disapproval, and therefore presenting themselves in a socially desirable manner.

Additionally, one can suspect that these male participants might also have felt less protected with this researcher who assumed a position of authority, in that there was chance that their responses would be repeated back to their family or the court. Thus, it is further acknowledged that their attempt to present themselves in a guarded manner may have been due to the sensitive nature of the topic, and due to the fact that families were involved in this process and resulted in possible fears of confidentiality and anonymity.

Despite this, once rapport was developed it appeared that the participants began to relax in their interviews and were able to talk freely and openly with the researcher and hence the researcher was able to elicit the problematic areas of the participants' families. However, the researcher also perceived the manner in which they illustrated their involvement in crime to be socially desirable as each participant was able to externalise blame onto other factors such as the family or peer pressure to relieve themselves of responsibility. Thus they seemed to view this female adult white psychologist as affiliated with an organisation that reports to the court about their involvement in criminal behaviour and thus may have presented their families in a negative light in order to relieve their own internal pressures in describing their criminality. Thus, these participants seemed to adopt both of these positions as they presented themselves to the authoritative position of the adult white researcher and psychologist in a socially desirable manner and thus vacillated between describing both positive and negative family characteristics.

#### **4.2.2 The racial status of the researcher**

Mac an Ghail (1994) describes the influence that race has when conducting research with adolescents. This is supported by Rubin and Rubin (2005) who illustrate how an individual's partial response may take place when the respondent's answers are affected by his or her reaction to the interviewer's race or social class. Thus, another feature of the study that needed to be taken into consideration was that often the researcher's white racial status may have been linked with a higher socioeconomic standing.

It can be speculated that these male juvenile delinquents initially appeared to find it difficult to talk to a white researcher. This was evidenced when some participants' questioned the researchers' background and place of residence and proceeded to express concern about whether the researcher would exhibit a lack of understanding toward their families and its lack of resources. Perhaps the notion that the researcher was not a member of their community made it more difficult for them to elaborate on their shortcomings or impoverished environments as they might assume that a white individual of assumed higher socioeconomic status may not understand their lives from their perspectives. As a result, this may have also influenced the restricted nature of some of these delinquent's responses to questions pertaining to their families and the homes that they resided in.

However, not all participants demonstrated a difficulty in talking to the researcher. It was noted that some participants appeared to find it relieving to reveal their families positive and negative features. Perhaps it was not the race of the researcher that these delinquents necessarily found appealing, but perhaps the perception that the researcher was not a member of their community and thus felt that they were freely able to describe their families and its impact on their criminal behaviour with the confidence that this would not be reported back to their families or community.

#### **4.2.3 The researcher's experience**

The researcher was very aware of the manner in which she conducted the research as this may have impacted on how these male juvenile delinquents responded to her – an individual that perhaps could have been conceived to be extremely different from the community that she was entering. As a result, in order to create a collaborative context for these offenders to talk about themselves and their family environments, the researcher attempted to adopt an informal style with the emphasis on trying to understand these delinquents' perceptions of their lives and being empathetic to them. This was achieved by aiming to create a non-judgemental and encouraging atmosphere in order to provide an environment which allowed these participants to talk about themselves and their families freely. It can be assumed that this informal approach perhaps did encourage participation from some of the participants, as the researcher was able to establish rapport in a timeous

manner and created an environment in which most of these individuals were willing to engage and express themselves freely and openly.

Despite the relaxed manner which the interviewer attempted to adopt, given the researcher's interest in families and their impact on one's behaviour - the particular questions, interventions or stance utilised by the researcher may have forced the participants to respond in a particular way to this intervention. This was often noted when the participant portrayed their family in a positive light, and the researcher continued to probe for any elements of negativity. This indicates that the researcher had a desire for the participants to respond in a specific manner and although the researcher was aware of this need, it may have impacted on the nature of the questions posed by her and may have further impacted on the responses of the participants. All these aspects need to be taken into consideration when reviewing the findings and discussion below.

This above viewpoint was specifically evidenced when, following each interview, the researcher recorded her thoughts and feelings about the process of the interview. When participants responded favourably to the researcher in a direct and open manner, in which they were able to describe both positive and negative aspects of their family lives, the researcher reported developing feelings of relief and excitement as the findings seemed to coincide with the purpose of the study. At other times the researcher reported to feel contradictory feelings of frustration towards some of the participants as they reported vague responses about their families, especially those who appeared to refute the impact and influence that the family had on them. However, for the researcher, it was apparent that this was her need to obtain findings that supported the theoretical stance adopted within this study and thus through supervision and reflection monitored herself throughout the interviewing as well as interpretation phases of the research.

Majority of the participants appeared to be uneasy and unsure as to how to relate to the researcher in the beginning stages of the interview. This was illustrated by some participant's initial reluctance to engage with the researcher. However, over time, perhaps with the result of becoming more familiar with the researcher and developing a sense of rapport, these participants became more open and were able to divulge further information

of a sensitive nature in the interviewing process. Further, although there was a level of openness that was established, the researcher felt that if additional interviews were to have been conducted, a sense of trust may have been further developed with the participants perhaps feeling confident to confide more in the researcher and reveal more areas of concern, whether these pertained to the family context or other areas of these individual's lives.

When discussing their experiences of being interviewed, majority of these delinquents described the process of being interviewed as being good for them as it allowed them to express themselves and their thoughts, a process they seldom felt available to them as they reported how they have never been given the opportunity to express such thoughts and feelings. Others commented that it felt good to have someone interested in their thoughts and opinions and with whom they felt comfortable to talk about difficult life situations. Thus, it appeared that for some of these offenders it was relieving to have an adult centring on their experiences and perceptions, rather than judging or problematising them. Despite the majority of participants displaying the positive impact of being able to talk openly and freely, a few others described the process in a vague and avoidant manner and did not describe the process in beneficial terms.

Finally, and interestingly the researcher did not feel anxious whilst conducting these interviews. As a white female in the presence of potential sexual offenders and individuals convicted of aggression inflicted upon others, the researcher did not feel unsafe at any time and there were no feelings of uncertainty that interrupted the interview process. The only discomfort experienced by the researcher was when a few of the participants complained of extreme poverty and then questioned the researcher upon her socioeconomic status. Although the researcher was able to contain such questions and facilitate further discussion around these areas of concern, the researcher did feel this may have had an impact on the responses revealed by the participants as mentioned above. All of the above aspects should be taken into consideration when reviewing the findings and discussion below.

### **4.3 OVERVIEW OF THE EMERGING THEMES**

Themes emerged as the participants were asked to describe their perceptions of their family. Some of these themes arose as a result of the researcher directing questions specifically related to theoretical findings illustrated in the literature. However, other individuals were able to talk freely and give in-depth descriptions of how they perceived their families to have had an influence on the development of their offending behaviour. Thus when organising these findings they revealed themes that related to the different family forms in which these delinquents resided, the functionality of the families relationships, patterns and response styles as well as the level of emotional involvement amongst their family members. Although a large amount of these findings supported theory stated in the literature, there were new categories that emerged as well as findings that contested the literature.

Furthermore, and as mentioned above, participants at first began to reveal their families in a favourable light as they were perceived by the researcher as guarded in revealing negative aspects about their families. Conversely, upon exploring specific aspects related to the family, participants' began to reveal aspects of family life that has negatively impacted on their behaviour and possibly instilling them with inadequate coping mechanisms. This attempt to portray themselves and their families as socially desirable at first may be related to them attempting to present themselves in a positive manner. It is assumed that these individuals needed to gain acceptance and positive approval from these diversion programmes that are to report back to the court on their progress and participation and thus consequently attempted to avoid blame for their involvement in crime in order to reduce their future sentencing. As an individual affiliated with these associations the researcher may have been presupposed to be affiliated in this decision making process. Thus, participants may have aimed to present themselves as well as their families in a socially desirable way to avoid blame and disapproval.

This social desirability was indicated by four participants who stated originally that their families were favourable and did not have an impact on their criminal behaviour. This is specifically illustrated in the statement made by participant one:

**P1:** *I have had no problems actually and my family did not have an affect on me...*

This participant attempted to reveal a positive self-presentation of both himself as well as his family and thus minimised the possible impact that his family may have had on his involvement in offending behaviour. This was demonstrated as upon further investigation of specific family aspects these participants began to reveal problematic family situations that impacted on their participation in criminal demeanour. Specifically, the statement from participant one contradicted his previous account which mentioned that his family had no impact on him:

**P1:** *You see I come from a very bad life with my father leaving us when we were small and that is why I came to do all these criminal things. Smoking zol, taking drugs, getting into gangs...eish....and there is my friend, me and him decided lets break into a house and so we robbed a house. My father makes me angry everyday and that is why I smoke weed everyday...*

This participant indicates how the loss of his father at an early age contributed to his involvement in illegal activities, despite previous statements of how he had no problems in his life that may have impacted on him negatively. Another participant went on to reveal how he felt that his family had a pessimistic impact on him, and although not stated overtly, implies how he feels they led to his criminal behaviour:

**P6:** *My family affected me by keeping a lot of secrets and not listening to my problems.*

Participant ten went onto reveal the anger, pain and frustration inflicted by his family and consequently attributed this to his involvement in violent acts:

**P10:** *I did not know myself. I was smoking weed before but then I never used to care about anything and I just gave up on everything. Probably it's when I think about my past and where I come from with my dad walking out...My biological dad left when I was eight months because I was the last born to him...And so every time I think about the past it makes me angry and then for years I have been like this – a very angry person. Because with him leaving and not looking back... So my mother*

*had seven kids who she had to raise by herself before we went to the shelter and were living a very bad life. This was because most times we would sleep in the streets and by the train station. Family did not want us living in their houses because my mother had so much kids... We were moving from home to home – some of us staying here and some of us staying there – and my father he left us with nothing...and so that is what made me angry... I would say basically the whole thing with what my father did affect me badly very much...and with my mom's family turning us down you know...*

The above quotes revealed how these participants perceived their families as an influencing factor in the development of their juvenile delinquent behaviour. Although these individuals began to describe their families in a restrictive manner, rapport and specific questions relating to the family began to result in the above findings. However, one must also question whether presenting their families in a negative light and placing blame upon this external structure may also be a socially desirable response from these participants. At first they portray a façade of the positive and ideal family but then continue to externalise blame to the family or peer influences due to internal pressures to describe their criminality. As mentioned in the previous section, by presenting the family in a negative light to the researcher who is considered a member of the organisation that runs the diversion programme, they may hope that the family will be viewed as being at fault for these individuals' engagement in crime and thus relieving them of their responsibility. Thus, these participants seemed to vacillate between presenting both the positive and negative aspects of their family as they attempted to portray themselves to the authoritative position of the researcher in a socially desirable manner to account for their involvement in criminal acts and therefore needs to be taken into consideration when reviewing the results and discussion below.

By stating that their family may have impacted on their criminal behaviour – these results are consistent with the literature where Farrington (2002) highlights that socioeconomic factors as well as personal insecurities and psychological problems arising from distressed family relationships can have an influence on the development of delinquent behaviour. These participants believed that they were not placed within an ideal context for adequate

development to take place and consequently felt that their family environment contributed to the formation of an 'angry' personality as physical protection and emotional support was failed to be experienced by these individuals providing a context in which they were unable to learn from the adults, particularly the father figure, in their family (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994). By illustrating how their families may have impacted on the formation of their offending behaviour, participants went on to reveal various themes related to their families and its perceived influence on them. These findings are disclosed in the sections below which pertain to the different family forms in which these delinquents resided, the functionality of the family's relationships, patterns and response styles as well as the level of emotional involvement amongst their family members. Despite the family being viewed as an influencing factor, at times it was viewed as a protective factor and in addition to this, other factors were also revealed as contributors and these are discussed throughout these themes in the form of contestation.

#### **4.4 THEME ONE: LOCATING THE DELINQUENT SELF IN DIFFERENT FAMILY FORMS**

One of the main themes derived from the interviews was the prevalence of single-headed households and how many theorists such as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) refer to this as the weakening and disruption of the traditional nuclear family which consists of the "*resident father and an ever-present mother instructing their children in proper values and morals; they also should provide role models, authority and supervision in order to avoid children turning to drugs, sexual experimentation or serious delinquency*" (p. 230). The following theme focuses on aspects related to the different family forms which may have lead to an increase in ones vulnerability to violence as often getting involved in crime may be used as a method of subsistence in order to survive when things like shelter, food or clothing is unavailable or insufficient. Being exposed to such risk factors may result in these individual's displaying poor impulse control or inadequate coping mechanisms which may consequently result in their criminal demeanour.

##### **4.4.1 Delinquency and the disrupted nuclear family**

When discussing aspects specifically related to delinquency, it became evident that majority of these offenders within the study were exposed to a disruption that took place in

their nuclear family of origin which often resulted in them having to live within single-parent households. This is demonstrated in the following quotes:

**P3:** *At home I stay with my uncle. He will go early in the morning and then only comes back at night and so we only see him on the weekends.*

**P10:** *My mom was very stressed as my father left and never looked back and she wanted to make sure that her children are able to have food everyday...*

These participants revealed that they resided with one caregiver and that the other biological caregivers no longer stayed with them, resulting in them being exposed to a single caregiver that is required to care for all of their needs. As a result, these participants are exposed to stressful circumstances where a single caregiver is required to provide financially to meet their most basic needs which may include providing food and shelter. Not only do these participants feel that these lack of resources contributed to their delinquent acts but due to long working hours and the unavailability of the one available caregiver also provides little supervision and may result in these individuals engaging in deviant crimes. Although the reasons for these disruptions are discussed in the following theme, these participants perceived their delinquency to be as a result of their worlds being full of chaos as a result of this family disruption. This is specifically illustrated by participant one who explains how living in a single-headed household contributed to his involvement in delinquent behaviour:

**P1:** *Like now when I need something, my mother is the only one working and she cannot buy us something because she is only paid a little bit of money... So I have to go and steal for me just so I can go and buy something else...*

Thus one can see from these above statements that the single caregiver, who was predominantly the mother, is faced with having to feed, clothe and nurture their children despite stressful circumstances as a result of poverty, long working hours or having to meet the demands of their children. When discussing what contributed to their delinquent involvement, the juveniles identified how being exposed to such family disruptions contributed to their incorrect behaviour. Therefore the above excerpts suggest that living in

a single-parent household can be viewed as a risk factor in the development of oppositional behaviour – a finding that is supported by Mkhondo (2005) as well as Koch and Wood (2002). This is further maintained by Palmary and Moat (2002) who states that in recent decades, both the number of one-parent families and the proportion of children under 18 who live in such families and are involved in crime has increased quite rapidly and continues to be a developing significant trend within South Africa. Koch and Wood (2002) go onto emphasise the amplification of juvenile delinquents predominantly residing in one-headed households with the mother being the main figure of parenting and authority. Majority of these single-parent scenarios was as a result of separation and divorce of the parents but in some cases one parent being the father figure had died – however this will be explored further in the following theme.

#### **4.4.2 The overcrowded family and offending behaviour**

Living in deprived situations which includes being exposed to an overcrowded living situation has been identified in the literature as a possible contributing factor in the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour. When discussing how they perceived their offending behaviour and the possible influences that impacted on their involvement in delinquent activities, participants one, three, six, seven and ten described how they believed residing with more than four people in a house that offered limited space could have acted as an influencing factor. The following comments illustrate the overcrowded living conditions these individuals were exposed to:

**P1:** *There are six of us living in a flat that has three bedrooms. I have got my own room...My mother and my sister – they share a room. My elder sister and younger brother share a room. And then my elder brother – he is staying with his girlfriend and they sleep in the lounge. For me it is like normal...it is about living a life with my family but I do not really have my own space.*

**P3:** *Me, my uncle and my young brother stay in one room which is in the bedroom...in the sitting room there are other people. They make lots of noise and there is only one bathroom so if you go to the bathroom these people are always coming in and going out. They go into the bathroom and are spending lots of time in the bathroom*

*when other people want to bath and go to work... because these people are not working and so it is not free at home.*

**P7:** *Four of us stay in a flat that has one bedroom...*

These participants indicate how living in such overcrowded environments impacted on their standard and freedom of living and although viewed as a normal way of life, it appears how these delinquents have been unable to develop a sense of autonomy or self-identity. According to Erikson (1968) adolescence is a stage where one becomes preoccupied with the question of identity, struggling with social interaction and grappling with moral issues. In living in such overcrowded and congested living situations, the juvenile delinquent may find this lack of separation from the family of origin difficult and thus resulting in a failure to negotiate a solid and autonomous identity which is often characterised by not having a sense of self and by confusion about their place in the world. This lack of identity is believed by Erikson (1968) to manifest in such behavioural abnormalities as criminality or gang affiliation in order to combat this role confusion and seek an identity outside the family of origin. This is supported by Standing (2005) who states that “*participation in gang activity is still substantially driven by such elements as group identity due to a lack of their own identity*” (p. 9). Thus living in such overcrowded situations can be seen as an influencing factor in the development of delinquent behaviour and a finding that links to Dissel’s (1999a) study which further illustrates how most juvenile delinquents came from deprived families, where they were living in overcrowded houses.

Other potential risk factors for getting involved in violent acts is specifically demonstrated by participant three who goes on to state how difficult his living circumstances are due to overcrowding and limited space:

**P3:** *When my uncle and his girlfriend come to us it becomes difficult because it is not safe to sleep in the one room when the girlfriend is there. You cannot sleep and sometimes when they sleep together and have sex – my uncle and his girlfriend can scream you see...so it is not good for us. I only sometimes see them because*

*sometimes they put some curtains up to divide the room but not all the time and I always hear their screaming which makes me uncomfortable.*

From this above statement, one can hypothesise how being exposed to overcrowded situations in which sexual practices amongst adults take place in front of their children may cause these children to believe that this is normal behaviour which may be contributing to increased sexual offences. However this is merely conjecture and cannot be assumed to be a primary factor that contributes to the development of antisocial behaviour but needs to be taken into account with other family factors such as low-economic status or poverty (Katsiyannis et al, 2004).

#### **4.4.3 Criminal involvement and the deprived family**

Mkhondo (2005), Simons et al (2005), Mercy et al (2002) as well as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) point out how one-parent families face extreme difficulties especially when living in poverty, as children living under such dearth conditions have often been associated with poorer academic outcomes, behavioural problems as well as emotional distress all factors that may result in delinquency. The following participants revealed that it was due to their problematic economic situations that contributed to their criminal behaviour:

- P1:** *When I do not have money or like I need new takkies to go out with on the weekend. And when I ask my mother and my mother does not have any extra money because she must still buy food for the house and then I just have to go and steal...*
- P2:** *I was feeling angry as there was food at home, but at school I was eating bad things in comparison to other children and I would tell them to give me their money and lunchboxes because I would like to have bought food from school but there was no money at home and so I had to steal.*

Due to having no money available within the family setting, these participants revealed how the impact of poverty harboured feelings of frustration and humiliation as they could not have what individuals in their surrounding peer groups were exposed to and consequently resulted in their criminal acts of theft. The following participant further describes his involvement in crime due to these feelings of anger and resentment that arose

as a result of poverty as not only did they deprive him of his most basic necessities but also prevented his consistent participation in education and schooling:

**P10:** *My father left us with nothing. With problems at home I could say firstly there is nobody working at home whatsoever..... so I was going to school every now and then and we were without food or whatever...going to bed without food.....you know I was very aggressive and very angry...*

Similar to the participant above, this offender was unable to continue schooling due to a lack of financial resources:

**P7:** *I left in about grade seven...That's when I left school because there was no money for school fees and for books and things like that... and I had to get a job and start working because no one is working in our house...and that is how I left school...*

The above participant revealed how he had to forego school and pursue employment in order for his family to survive due to their poor economic status. Not only does this foster feelings of humiliation and degradation which can cause one to be involved in criminal acts to counteract this feelings of hopelessness, but without education, the school is unable to act as a protective factor and increases ones chances of becoming involved in antisocial behaviour (Mercy et al, 2002).

Thus, all the above participants illustrated how living under such deprived circumstances proved to be stressful and degrading for them as they were unsure of where their next meal would come from and for others, like participant ten, who experienced rejection from an absent father who would not assist in providing for his essential needs. Consequently and specifically indicated by participant one and two, such dire and humiliating circumstances can result in one committing criminal activities to overcome and counteract these feelings of desperation. These results give evidence to the findings of Mkhondo (2005), Katsiyannis et al (2004) and Mercy et al (2002) who state that living in a single-parent household of low economic status has been acknowledged as a risk factor, resulting in children who are prone to anxiety-depression symptoms as well as oppositional behaviour – aspects displayed by these participants. Mkhondo (2005) highlights how with being

unable to obtain such primary resources required for survival can generate a shattering experience for children, resulting in them engaging in patterns of behaviour in which they seek instant gratification to meet these needs, hence some of these participants resorting to criminal acts in order to obtain what they so desperately require to survive.

#### **4.4.4 Living in other locations and delinquent behaviour**

Four of the participants introduced the theme of their delinquent behaviour as a result of being sent to live in a different location or with other relatives due to poor socioeconomic circumstances. This is consistent with Mkhondo (2005) as well as Koch and Wood (2002) who proposed that a good percentage of a juvenile delinquent population were sent to live with relatives other than their parents.

**P2:** *I lived with my grandmother because my mother was wanting a job and to work. It was difficult for me because when I moved to where my grandmother lives, I did not know the language that they were speaking. I often feel like I am alone and I have missed my mother.*

**P7:** *When I was 11 or a bit younger then we used to live in the location...and so we never really had a home that we could stay in...And so my mother would send me to...how can I say...like a formal...but it is in Rustenburg...it is like a home and she sent me there when I was young for about four or five years and I was living there. It was fine because I was small at the time but the first year was hectic because I was alone there and there was no one that I could really look up to.*

**P10:** *At first we were staying in Klerksdorp and then we came to Johannesburg where we lived in a shelter for about five years before my mother could become stable... And so mostly I stay with my foster dad in Cresta where I have been staying with him for more than three years now...but I do come home for the weekends with my mom as I love her very much and I have to come see her every weekend.*

Thus it can be argued that being sent away to live with other family members can create a lot of psychological distress for these participants where even though their alternative caregivers may have acted as effectively and resourcefully as possible, majority of them purported to missing and desiring contact with their absent biological parents from their

family of origin. This was emphasised by participant two and seven who mentioned their loneliness as well as a lack of a role model respectively. From these findings, one may hypothesise that it is these feelings of discontent as well as a lack of parental guidance that may have led these individuals to pursue a delinquent path. This is unswerving from Mkhondo's (2005) theoretical perspective of how the lack of / or unavailability of the mother who was either working somewhere or unemployed and unable to look after the child, may result in a negative impact on some of these youths and consequently influence their acting out behaviour. Furthermore, by being separated from their families of origin, these offenders illustrated a sense of aloneness which is accompanied by no sense of belonging. In order to counteract these unbearable feelings, these offenders may have sought to belong in deviant peer groups or gang affiliations. This is supported by Standing (2005) who reveals that "*people join gangs as an act of rebellion but also to find a sense of belonging*" (p. 9).

#### **4.4.5 Displaced living and instability**

The same four participants from the above theme also felt that due to poverty stricken situations their caregivers were unable to offer them a sense of stability as they often had to relocate on a regular basis due to an inability to afford standard living accommodation. They further illustrated that not having a stable sense of location in space often lead to feelings of frustration, anger and resentment which additionally contributed to their involvement in crime. The following quotes demonstrate their sense of instability and displacement:

**P1:** *My father left us when we were young and so it was just my mother alone with seven of us...And so we were moving from house to house – my family were. My grandmother had a house which she left for my mother and her sisters but they never wanted us there. So we had to move from people to people just for us to have places to stay, until we ended up in town at a place of safety in this building.*

**P2:** *My mother was working here in Joburg and she took me and said let me go home and stay with my grandmother and so I went to stay with her for about eight years and then I came back here. Then I left here and had to go back again and then I came back here now. It was difficult to keep moving...*

- P7:** *My mother told me that before we never had a place really to stay because we living by these people then another people and we were moving around you see... And so she told me that because she had no money that she just wanted to find me a nice place to stay because she told me that she can see that I was struggling.*
- P10:** *Most of the times we would sleep in streets and by the train station. Family did not want us living in their houses because my mother had so much kids... And we could not go to my granny's house either because my aunty and them lived there and so they did not want us there either. We were moving from home to home some of us staying here and some of us staying there...and so that is what made me angry...*

These individuals highlighted how living under such unstable conditions was extremely difficult and distressing for them. Although there is no theoretical evidence to support this new category, it can be assumed that growing up in such dire and traumatic conditions must have a huge psychological impact on these individuals and was often expressed as they referred to themselves as '*angry and aggressive*' as a result of their living conditions. When looking at these statements from a more analytical perspective one can see the emotional strain such situations may have put on these participants as they seem to have experienced feeling unwanted and rejected by family members as well as struggling as they had no sense of stability or security due to moving from place to place with no safe and secure home environment. Thus, based on this premise, one can assume that such experiences may have caused these angry and aggressive feelings which may have led to their participation in criminal acts.

A further hypothesis is highlighted by Standing (2005) who states that individuals often join gangs and consequently become involved in antisocial behaviour in order to protect their turf as well as themselves. Therefore these participants reveal how they have never been able to establish a sense of location in space and thus feeling that no space ever belonged to them. They consequently could become territorial and aim to defend any space that belongs to them which may involve them becoming involved in criminal acts or affiliated with gangs or deviant peers to protect whatever sense of belonging they have established. Thus poverty within their family environments may be seen as a source of

frustration during these participant's childhoods and may be perceived as an influencing factor in the development of criminal activity.

#### **4.4.6 The nuclear family and criminality**

In spite of the above sub-themes indicating how these juvenile delinquent's perceived their disrupted nuclear family to have contributed to the development of offending behaviour, this sub-theme highlights the areas of contestation that contradict these findings. Thus, in contrast to living in single-headed or overcrowded households or ones that were characterised by deprivation, the remaining participants were found to reside in what can be referred to as nuclear and traditional families. Three participants came from a conventional home setting in which both a mother and father were present which contributed to good economic stability as both parents were employed. The fourth participant, although his father passed away a few years ago, lived with his mother and uncle as well as other family members, which can now be considered a nuclear South African family as all members contribute to the household and children's education and thus allowing for an environment in which sufficient living occurs.

**P2:** *We live in an RDP house that has a bathroom, four bedrooms and one kitchen. I live with my mom and my uncle and my two sisters.*

**P5:** *I live with my father and my mother and I only have one brother. It seems that financially everything is okay.*

**P6:** *It is my mom and dad, two sisters and two...no three...no two brothers because I am the second boy in the family. Sometimes, we have our ups and downs and sometimes it is okay but the family has always had enough money.*

**P9:** *It's me, my mom, my dad, my brother and his girlfriend and his son but they are going to move out soon. Both my mom and dad work but my father is now only working part-time. And so we have always had money and they have always provided food in our house.*

The above participants revealed that they lived within a traditional South African family whether this formed the father-mother-child triad or consisted of an extended family living environment. They therefore illustrate that the composition of the family is not a single

contributor in the development of crime but may be a variety of family characteristics that result in this type of antisocial behaviour. This is supported by Palmary and Moat (2002) as well as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) who believe that coming from a nuclear family can contribute to an individual's resilience levels of getting involved in crime, however this does not seem to be the incidence in this study, as even though these juveniles came from nuclear families they still got involved in criminal activities. However, this may be due to other family factors that will be revealed further into the study. This is supported by Carter and McGoldrick (1999) who state that a two-parent nuclear family used to be considered developmentally normal and healthy for a child's upbringing but that in today's modern and constantly shifting society, there are a variety of family settings which are viewed as stable and adequate. This provides an indication that a variety of families are becoming a more common place in our society and thus can not be seen as a singular cause in the development of criminal behaviour. In the following themes more emphasis is placed on the dysfunctional relationships or inadequate emotional involvement experienced by these participant's families which needs to be taken into consideration in conjunction with the nature of the family setting as factors that may implicate the development of antisocial behaviour.

#### **4.4.7 The idealised family**

A further area of contestation existed as some participants went on to state that their family did not have an influence on their offending behaviour. When asked about their general perceptions of how they feel their family impacted on their lives and whether they see their families as an influencing factor in their development of antisocial behaviours, majority of the participants alleged that their families were devoid of any problems. This is reflected in the following statements:

**P2:** *They have made me a good person because they were teaching me respect and how to live with people.*

**P8:** *The good things are that they took me to school so that I can be educated and they have provided me with shelter and food to eat so that I can be a better person. And the bad things are...uh, they have never done anything bad.*

**P9:** *Look, I grew up in a loving home here by my granny. I wasn't brought up in a family that just buys you something I was brought up in a loving home.*

These participants indicated how they felt they had been brought up in families that provided them with love, support, understanding as well as the basic necessities required for survival such as food, shelter and education. They also illustrated how they did not perceive their families to have had a negative impact on their development and thus denied their home environments as influencing their advancement into criminal behaviour. This is supported by the Department of Correctional Services (2005) which states that it is not only those from dysfunctional families that engage in acts of criminality. There are categories of offenders that come from functional, affluent and loving families that attest to this, despite the importance that the family plays in the moulding of an individual's personality and how they function in society (Department of Correctional Services, 2005). Leve and Chamberlain (2004) also highlight that there are other family factors as well as alternative factors such as peer pressure which can contribute to the development of delinquent behaviour. Thus, although the family has a major influential role in contributing to the development of criminal behaviour, one must not fail to take other potential risk factors into consideration when looking at offending populations.

#### **4.5 THEME TWO: OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR AND THE FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS, PATTERNS AND RESPONSE STYLES**

Saradjian (1996) points out how loss and disruption of family relationships, particularly those that take place during one's childhood, can be associated with various psychopathological symptoms, including the participation in delinquent acts. This is supported in South African findings conducted by Segal et al (1999) as well as the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998) where disrupted homes due to parental transitions and dysfunctional families were found to be influential in young offenders' decision to commit crime. Similarly, the participants in this study experienced their parents getting divorced or separated at an early age or having lost a parent due to bereavement or being heavily involved in dysfunctional relationships which involved family conflict and aggression resulting in their family lives being riddled with tension and conflict – all aspects that they perceived as contributing to their involvement in crime.

Another one of the main sub-themes that evolved from this study was the incompatible response styles that families inflicted upon these participants in the form of inconsistent discipline. Due to the decline and disorganisation of the family as mentioned in sub-themes above, it was evident from these individuals that at times they were unsupervised and not given order and regulation consistently. Thus, some family members disciplined utilising certain techniques whilst other caregivers went about trying to regulate order in a different manner, and thus resulting in conflicting parenting styles being imposed upon these offenders. The sub-themes below highlight this incongruence as participants receive adequate discipline which is accompanied by love and warmth from one family member, but then are exposed to other harsher or ineffective forms of discipline from another family member. Alternatively, the same caregiver may inflict different modes of punishment upon these individuals – all which may be to their detriment and according to Mbhele (2003) may have impacted on the development of their criminal behaviour. These factors will be described individually in this section in order to ascertain whether these family relationships, patterns and response styles can be viewed as a good predictor of whether certain individuals will participate in delinquency.

#### **4.5.1 Parental transitions and delinquency**

When discussing what these delinquents perceived to impact on their offending behaviour, a strong theme of disrupted family relationships and parental transitions arose as many participants revealed how they had experienced disturbances in the relationships between their parental figures which impacted on them psychologically. They further attributed their criminal demeanour due to breakdowns in divorce or via separation of the adults' relationships which appeared to have a negative impact on these participants as they experienced bitterness and rage toward the absent parent which was predominantly the father. These responses below reveal how painful and difficult it was when their father left:

- P4:** *It feels bad that my parents separated because I used to see my father being there every day, sitting there with my mom and all of us being able to talk together. Now he just talks to me when he has a chance...so we communicate mostly by phone.*
- P8:** *It was painful for me when my parents separated because I knew that we would not see our father often.*

These participants indicate how difficult it was for them when one of their caregivers left as a result of parental separation or divorce. They seemed to feel that it had a huge impact on the functionality of the family as it no longer operated in the manner that it used to due to the absence of their caregiver and how this resulted in the development of angry and painful emotions. Two of the participants specifically indicated how their father's departure impacted on them negatively and in some cases felt it led to their participation in crime:

**P1:** *My parent's separation and their aggressive relationship was quite painful and so I come from a very bad life with my father leaving us when we were small and that is why I came to do all these criminal things.*

**P10:** *When parents get a divorce it is really hard for us kids. I am angry and I would probably say it's because I have kept this grudge against my father walking out on us for many years.*

These participants exclusively describe how the loss of their parental figure due to cessation of contact was experienced as traumatic and painful. This often resulted in predominant feelings of anger and aggression being experienced and they affiliated this loss with their engagement in antisocial acts. This is supported by Mkhondo (2005) who illustrates how the destruction of family relationships during the early years of development may be cited as having a major impact on the development of aggression, pain and confusion and a contributing factor that needs to be explored when attempting to identify what may lead these children into conducting antisocial crimes.

From the above responses from all of the participants, one can see that disconnected homes in the form of parental divorce or separation can have a devastating impact on their psychological well-being as it resulted in the participants living with only one caregiver and rarely, if ever, seeing their other biological parent – impacting on the individual not only economically but also emotionally. This emotional impact was evident in the above responses as participants communicated underlying feelings of rejection, bitterness, anger as well as pain, hurt and sadness. This is verified by Saradjian (1996) who argues that “*due to the utter dependency of children on their carers, any loss or separation from them has a distressing psychological effect on the child*” (p. 45). As the participants revealed

that they became involved in criminal acts or endured feelings of devastation and anger it perhaps could support Mkhondo's (2005) theoretical perspective which reveals that such individuals may feel more vulnerable to becoming involved in crime as not only does parental divorce or separation result in a negative psychological effect but may also impact on the families structure and functioning as it also creates a loss of stability and family cohesion – aspects that were revealed in the previous theme where a disruption in economic status can impact drastically on an individual's life as they are exposed continually to a dysfunctional family.

However, divorce or separation often causes family wars as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) described how children may be caught in the middle of two argumentative parents where they become victims or expected to accept new definitions of the former spouse. Participant eight reveals his stress in the following statement:

**P8:** *My relationship with my dad is kind of arguing because when you try to talk to him about my mom he starts shouting and begins to tell us how bad our mother is and that she treats him badly and it is horrible.*

This participant demonstrates the stressful predicament he experiences due to being the object of his parent's projected anger as a result of their separation and how he perceived this demanding family situation to have impacted on his involvement in antisocial behaviour. This is evidenced by Regoli and Hewitt (1994) where studies have verified that a relationship between parental absence and a host of social and emotional ills can result in increased rates of psychological disturbance, drug use, gang affiliation and involvement in criminal activities.

Another traumatic factor that causes parental transition within the family and may play a role in the development of delinquent behaviour is the significant loss of a family member through bereavement. This is verified by Dissel (1999a) who believes that loss in the form of death constitutes a major source of childhood trauma. Depending on how it is handled, Dissel (1999a) indicates how this may later contribute to disordered behaviour, including violence and aggression – thus stating that the loss or absence of an influential family

member may influence the child's engagement in criminal behaviour. An immense amount of participants in this study were exposed to either a death or loss of contact with a family member. These participants who experienced bereavement related this to the development of their aggressive and violent tendencies as they demonstrated the devastating impact such a loss had upon them:

- P3:** *My daddy died in an accident and I do miss him. If I think about my daddy then I begin to start crying and then it makes me angry and so I just keep quiet. I spoke to my uncle but he did not help me...he tried to do good things for me to try and make me forget about it, but it's not easy.*
- P4:** *When my great uncle died I talked about my sadness to my mother and father and they told me that if I want to go to a psychologist then I can go. But they did not have the money and I just did not end up going.*
- P6:** *When my uncle and my cousin died I kept it to myself because sometimes when I try to talk to my family they tell me that this person has passed and has moved onto another life and you cannot bring him back. So I cannot really talk about my feelings because they will tell me that I must just accept the death.*

From this data it is revealed how these participants were deeply affected by the death of a family member and how it was not handled effectively within the family as they were unable to talk about the pain related to their loss and the unpleasant feelings that they experienced as a result of this. These quotes illustrate how underlying feelings of pain are unable to be expressed appropriately and often manifest themselves in the form of anger and frustration. They often attributed these overwhelming feelings as contributing to the formation of their antisocial demeanour. One participant in particular was exposed to a secretive death and one that he was unaware of how his actual father died:

- P2:** *My father died and it was hard for me because his family did not want to see me and did not want to speak to me or my mother because they were saying and thinking that my mother killed my dad.*

This participant illustrates how he was not even aware of how his father died and due to the secretive nature of the death was unable to mourn or even understand his death. Furthermore, this participant also did not understand the concept of death and this was only explained to him in his later years, leaving him as a young child questioning the loss of his father and perhaps the confusion this may have evoked:

**P2:** *When my dad died I just keep quiet because I was knowing nothing. I was little and did not understand what was going on. Only now did my mother tell me that he was sick and they took him to Mpumalanga and that he died there.*

Thus, not only has this participant been unable to talk about the impact that his father's death had on him, he also went for many years not understanding what actually happened to his father, resulting in unresolved feelings towards this significant loss. Furthermore, when looking at how the above participants described the loss of their family members, it seems indicative that this was a turning point in their lives and often resulted in feelings of anger and pain that they were unable to deal with adequately. Therefore these individuals may have poor problem-solving skills as well as a deprived ability for adequate conflict resolution which may have resulted in them relieving these discontent feelings in the form of aggressive acts (Mkhondo, 2005). This goes on to indicate what Dissel (1999a) referred to by stating that the death of a loved family member constitutes a major source of childhood trauma which, depending on how it is dealt with, may later result in one's involvement in aggressive or violent acts.

However, it is also important to note that some other participants who experienced the death of a family member were able to bereave in a sufficient manner as they were able to talk to someone about their painful feelings and at times families came together to mourn the loss of a loved one. Thus, the bereavement of a family member and being exposed to adequate resources to allow one to overcome this loss cannot always be seen as a protective factor in preventing an individual from engaging in criminal acts.

Despite these findings, Regoli and Hewitt (1994) state that the relationship between disrupted homes in the form of parental transitions and a child's participation in

delinquency is reasonably weak as the presence of other positive relationships with the single-parent or external caregivers can promote health and encouragement. Thus another important factor to consider within the family environment is the quality of the parent-child relationship as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) reveal that this can be considered as an important determinant of whether an individual will become involved in delinquency. *“The implication is that dysfunctional homes weaken the attachment of children to their parents, freeing children to participate in delinquency”* (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994, p. 232). Thus, the following sub-theme looks at how these disrupted families resulted in parental absenteeism and how this impacts on the individual’s psychological wellbeing.

#### **4.5.2 Offending behaviour and parental absenteeism**

As Regoli and Hewitt (1994) highlighted above, many of the participants within this study battled to cope with their distant relationships that occurred due to their parent’s separation. In addition to this, Regoli and Hewitt (1994) conducted a study that revealed juvenile males were profoundly troubled by their parent’s divorce or separation and suffered extreme distress as they felt that their absent caregivers, predominantly the father figure, did not visit them often enough. Similarly, the results of this study began to display a comparable profile to these findings as majority of these delinquent males indicated a desire for contact with their deficient father.

**P1:** *My father did not support us in everyway – he gave us nothing and I feel very rejected by him.*

**P4:** *It was difficult when my dad left because I was used to him being there everyday and coming home from work everyday and I was used to seeing him in the seat where my mom now sits and with both of them being together and we would all eat together and talk together but now he has left for good.*

**P7:** *When I was young I used to think about how would it be to have a father but since I was small he hasn’t been there. It was in those days when I was angry but I never knew where does he live or how does he look like ...I do not want to see him because he wasn’t there for me and so I do not want to see him.*

**P10:** *I did not know what was going on with my mom and dads’ divorce because I was eight months at the time and by the age of four or thereabouts I told them and asked*

*them many questions. So when I got to six then my mom told me what happened and it was really hard for me because I would always ask where's my dad, where's my dad, where's my father.*

From the above statements, it is evident the despair these participants experienced as a result of their disconnected relationship with a biological caregiver who was predominantly the father figure. Thus one can observe that these participants perceive their absent father to have caused them a large amount of pain and suffering – impacting on their experience of pain, anger and feelings of rejection. Such feelings of rejection and abandonment often manifest themselves in aggressive forms and thus were perceived by these individuals to impact on their violent behaviour.

These findings are justified by Mkhondo (2005) who states that majority of juvenile delinquents experience hurt, resentment and antagonism toward their absent fathers for having abandoned them and toward their mothers for having created disconnected homes and leaving the family in a situation of poverty resulting in them engaging in criminal behaviours to meet their needs. Participant one and ten specifically stated that they feel their absent fathers led them to get involved in criminal activities as they state *'I smoke weed everyday to take away that anger and pain that he caused me'* and *'Basically the whole thing with what my father did affect me badly very much'*. This link between the absence of a parent, resulting in involvement in criminal activity, supports the findings of academic research conducted by Koch and Wood (2002) who suggest that children who experience the undeviating or semi-permanent loss of a significant parental figure to whom they are emotionally attached may suffer serious emotional disturbances as a result. Such loss, it is argued, may contribute to later disturbed, aggressive or even violent behaviour and thus has been considered an important contributing factor when investigating the family (Koch & Wood, 2002).

#### **4.5.3 Juvenile delinquency: Family conflict and violence**

Although no family members had been convicted of a crime, a predominant number of participants reported their involvement in juvenile delinquency to be related to the presence of family conflict and aggression which involved family members engaging in substance

abuse accompanied by hostility or the witness of violence being exerted from one family member to another. They felt that by observing this brutal behaviour within their home environments, it taught them that this was a method in which conflict is handled and thus often contributed to their involvement in criminal demeanour. This is supported by Palmary and Moat (2002) who illustrate how children who are exposed to violence may learn that violence is an acceptable way to express discontent – and this is further impacted on by social and economic conditions as violence may be a means to escape such conditions that have been discussed above. Firstly, these participants began to indicate how aggression was often witnessed between their parents:

**P8:** *My dad comes home late when my mom told him to come home at this time then they start arguing by shouting at each other a lot and my dad used to beat up my mom and it was painful for me to see them fighting so much.*

**P10:** *My father hit my mother and things like that. He used to abuse her really a lot. Until she got meningitis...she got it like three years ago...she got meningitis with all the beating up from that time. And she was in hospital for about three to four weeks and it was difficult but she is alright now. She would come home from church and he would beat her for no reason you know...and he did it everyday...for no reason... He was very aggressive.*

These excerpts reveal how the participant's observed their parents engaged in conflictual fights which involved both verbal and physical abuse. These statements further indicate the impact that witness to parental violence can have on a child as these participants reveal the anger and pain such experiences resulted in. This is specifically illustrated by participant one who revealed the impact that witness to violence has had on him:

**P1:** *Well with my father...I do not forgive him for all the times that he was hitting my mother...and abusing her.*

This participant disclosed how the witness of violence between his mother and father motivated his need to engage in physical fights due to his experiences of extreme anger towards his father. He also divulged his need to smoke marijuana on a daily basis to

relieve him from his internal anger as he stated that *'when I do not smoke it, I just feel angry'*. Thus, participant one specifically indicates how witness to violence in his home surroundings has harboured a breeding ground for a large amount of aggressive feelings which he releases in the form of physical fights, damage to properties and substance abuse. Other participants went on to reveal the aggressive and violent conflict that they were exposed to within their households as a result of alcohol abuse and the similar feelings it resulted in:

- P1:** *Ja...they did fight a lot... My father often accused my mother of jolling around when he came home drunk and would start beating my mother everyday...and so my mother left him. They had a very very aggressive relationship and there was no love there...and well with my father...I do not forgive him for all the times that he was hitting my mother and abusing her.*
- P2:** *My father was drinking so he could not give me everything that I wanted and when he was drunk he hated my mother. He takes things out and breaks them and spills blood... He broke everything even mirrors in the house and then he would beat my mom. I feel angry sometimes when I think about it because he kept on hitting my mother when he was drunk.*
- P11:** *When I was still small my father was also living in our house but he would drink and come home and be shooting the ceiling because he wanted to shoot her. She would tell me that he would be drinking and then come home and would always want to fight with her and then she would show him and hit him with something...with like a broom or something...*

Due to substance abuse, the above participants witnessed their father's use of brutal force upon their mothers – observations that resulted in feelings of extreme anger as they were unable to help or defend their caregiver. These offenders often attributed such uncontained feelings to result in their juvenile delinquent behaviour.

When discussing further family characteristics that they perceived to be influential in their aggressive behaviour, these participants went onto reveal that witness of violence did not just take place between their caregivers, but was inflicted upon other family members as

well. Specifically, participant one went on to reveal how his father beat his two older brothers whereas participant two divulged how his mother often beat his sister and that as a result problematic situations in their house is dealt with by fighting physically, subsequently teaching them that to behave in such violent manners is considered 'normal':

**P1:** *The only thing I can remember is that he used to hit my two bigger brothers and I think he would have hit me when I got older.*

**P2:** *My mother and my sister – they were fighting everyday where they were shouting and hitting each other and then my sister got her things together and moved out to another place.*

Thus for these participant's they not only witnessed violence being carried out between their caregivers, but actually saw this aggressive behaviour being conducted on their siblings and even believed that they might become victims of the same violent acts. Moreover, other family members were also shown to engage in conflictual activities:

**P7:** *My uncle, he will go out and fight you see...he will go there to the location you see...and they do their stuff there... There are a lot of guys and so his friends will come and pick him up with the others that are going there and then they will go and argue there in the location and things like that you see...*

**P10:** *Um...my one brother was in and out from jail because of the life we were living; he used to go and steal and things – he also used to be on drugs. The other one quit school and he went to go and work but he could not help my mother because he was on drugs.*

It is evident from these participants that other family members and caregivers, despite parental figures, were also involved in dangerous activities which involved the use of physical force and criminal acts. Thus, these offenders went on to reveal how being exposed to problem-solving within their family situations in the form of violent behaviour has modelled for them that this type of aggressive behaviour is utilised to resolve conflicts and subsequently impacted on how they act within their communities – utilising force and violence. This is specifically indicated by participant one, six as well as 11 as they went on

to indicate how fights and disagreements were handled in the house as they utilised violence as a form of conflict resolution due to learning and modelling this from their caregivers:

**P1:** *Me and my brothers we have fought physically with each other a lot of times.*

**P6:** *A few days later my cousin and my mom were beating up my sister. So I came and I tried to stop them and so they started to beat me. I stood up... I stood up and pushed my cousin and tripped her.*

**P11:** *Me and my cousin did have a fight so I did throw her with a glass. You know she was angry for me and she started swearing at me and afterwards I did not hear her coming and she smacked me in my face...eish... Afterwards I go in the kitchen and on my way out and because she smacked me, so I did grab a glass and throw her with the glass and run...*

These participants provide evidence that they have learned that aggressive and violent behaviour is utilised as a means of resolving problems as well as dealing with undesirable feelings. They perceived such behaviour to be as a result of observing family members engaged in these types of problem solving activities and therefore have modelled and learned that cruel deeds can be utilised to solve conflictual situations. These excerpts further indicate how witness to violence within one's home environment often teaches the caregivers offspring that aggression and violence is a form of conflict resolution. They describe how being witness to so much physical aggression within their households often resulted in themselves or their siblings utilising similar methods to solve conflicts with other family members or peers. Thus, these participants were exposed to a vast amount of violence within their households as physical beatings became acknowledged as a way in which conflict and anger is dealt with. Therefore, although these participants did not have exposure to criminal parents, they were exposed to other adverse socialising conditions which need to be taken into consideration. This is supported by Sharpe and Litzelfelner's (2004) as well as McCord's (1999) data which verifies that social factors such as alcohol abuse, absenteeism, severe family conflict and aggression have an increased impact on the children – indicating that parental conflict and parental aggression can be considered as instigating factors as no protective measures are in place to counteract these aggressive and

hostile environments. This is supported by Mkhondo (2005) who states how individuals living in such environments are provided with limited opportunities for learning appropriate problem solving skills, social skills and conflict resolution which may have contributed to their aggressive acting out behaviour.

In addition to the above findings, learned aggression was also a common premise amongst these youth as they observed family members solve their children's own problems via violent and harsh techniques. This is indicated in the quotes below:

**P2:** *Someone is beating me up at school and I will only speak to my school about it and will not speak about it at home because my uncle could go and beat that boy and the school is going to kick me out. And my mom – I do not talk to her because she is going to go to school and talk strange things. She will take that boy outside and will beat him and tell him not to beat her child and that she does not want to hear anymore about this. So if I could tell her then she would beat that boy.*

**P7:** *It is like with the people outside you see... Like if I did argue with that one then my uncle he now wants to involve himself and he wants to know. Like I was now arguing with somebody and he also wants to know what is going on because he also wants to now be involved you see. He now wants to shout at that person and tell them that I am right and things like that. For me I do not like it because for me like from what I have seen he has got like a...how can I say...like when he gets cross he gets cross very quickly you see...*

**P8:** *If you talk to my father and tell him that you were fighting with someone he will go and beat that person up and he will beat us up and will tell us not to fight again...*

From the above quotations it is evident that violent ways of solving problems also take place outside of the family setting. These participants have gone to their caregivers for assistance with problematic experiences that they have been undergoing and subsequently resulted in these caregivers resolving the problem in a violent manner. Thus, these participants are exposed to violent conflict resolution within their family settings which subsequently promotes faulty and aggressive problem solving methods within these individuals and thus they perceived this to be reason for their aggressive acting out

behaviour as it is the only way they have learned to solve problems. This is supported by Bhana and Hochfeld (2001) who reveal that delinquents learn aggressive behaviour as it is the only method of conflict resolution or communication that is displayed in their home environments and thus learning that violence is a means to control situations, maintain power, and that it invariably works.

When looking at the amount of violence these delinquents were exposed, it is also important to question whether any forms of physical, emotional or even sexual abuse were carried out in their families to further act as a contributing factor in the formation of their offending behaviour. One would deem this area important to investigate as Pistorius (2005), Contos Shoaf (2002), Palmary and Moat (2002), Loucks and Zamble (2000), Kenny, Seidler, Keogh and Blaszczyński (1999) as well as McCord (1999) all have produced findings that reveal that delinquent offenders were often sexually, physically or emotionally abused as children, and thus is assumed to have an impact on their display of aggressive and violent behaviour. However in contestation to these consistent findings within these studies, it did not present as a theme in this study. All of the participants stated that none of them had been exposed to any form of abuse within their family environments. Although participant six did refer to being beaten often by his father as well as being exposed to negative verbal comments from his parents, this did not seem to occur on a regular basis and seemed to be more in the form of discipline rather than actual abuse. Additionally, with participant six being the only individual to communicate his perception of abuse, it was not accountable as a theme.

In spite of these findings, Kenny et al (1999) does mention the possibility of the understatement of abuse, given the rates reported by other studies conducted both within South Africa as well as internationally. Self-disclosure of sexual or physical abuse by juvenile offenders, according to Kenny et al (1999) is unlikely to occur during initial assessments, but is more likely to be revealed in an ongoing therapeutic relationship during treatment. Kenny et al (1999) go on to highlight that a young person may be ashamed or feel that they cannot trust the researcher enough during the assessment phase to disclose this information. This is particularly likely in certain cultural sub-groups and constitutes a potential limitation for one-off interviews (Kenny et al, 1999). Similarly, and as mentioned in the

beginning of this chapter participants may be reluctant to disclose adverse family characteristics or circumstances. Thus, although not considered a theme for this study, abuse within the family should continue to be taken into consideration when examining the potential influencing factors that may lead to the development of antisocial behaviour. This is due to the notion of under-stating abuse as well as the vast amount of literature that is available stating that abuse constitutes a vital role in the formation of behavioural as well as emotional problems which may in turn result in the construction of criminal behaviour (Mkhondo, 2005).

A further area of contestation looks at how participants also witnessed violence outside of their family environments and felt that it impacted on their delinquent demeanour due the trauma they were exposed to:

**P10:** *This one night we had no place to stay and my family had just chased me and my mother and my sister away and so we had to go and sleep in a park. I was about four or so and I had to see how a woman got murdered. It was frightening and it was something that I just try to forget about it because it just runs around in your mind.*

**P11:** *I was shocked because they come to the house swearing and shouting at me and chasing me around the streets with their car.*

Thus, not only is the family environment in which these participants live communicating that problems are resolved through the use of violence and aggression, but the surrounding communities in which they reside are also portraying the same message. Therefore it is important to note however, that although exposure to family conflict and aggression may be seen as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour, exposure to other violent and traumatic experiences are also mentioned by these delinquents to impact on the origin of their aggressive behaviour. Mkhondo (2005) supports this finding as previous studies have shown that juvenile delinquents exposed to a large amount of community violence resulted in the development of decreased school performance, substance abuse, behavioural problems as well as emotional disturbances – aspects that are beginning to take form in these participants.

In support of looking within one's community to alternative influencing factors, other than the family, these participants began to reveal the influence that peer pressure had on the formation of their aggressive behaviour. When these participants were questioned as to what impacted on their delinquent behaviour, as opposed to just mentioning family risk factors, some of these individuals indicated how participation in specific peer groups and exposure to violence amongst these cliques resulted in their criminal acts:

- P7:** *With guys that are my age you see...we get into fights a lot. I can say that maybe it is friends because there are a whole lot of guys that are around and some of them are a bad influence. Like if you meet now with a guy and you are with your group of friends they will say to you that you must go and slap that boy you see... And if you do not then they will say that you are scared of him and they will call you a moffie or something... If they say that you must do something and you do not want to then they will be on your case the whole day even if you just wanted to do the right stuff...*
- P9:** *I developed my anger when I was maybe there by the high school because I realised that people mustn't always undermine me because I'm friendly with everybody but that they feel they can undermine me. Then sometimes I would stand up for myself or for my friend maybe because my friend was very soft in the heart and would not fight and things so I would stand up for him. So I got angry because I do not like it when people made me feel small and horrible.*
- P11:** *When I see the guys it's now on the weekends and they are getting aggressive now, going on with people where they are not supposed to. They are always talking and laughing at people.*

Thus, these participants indicate how peer pressure and conforming to social norms was required and thus participating in criminal acts was a way to be accepted by various friendship groups. Mercy et al (2002) illustrates how adolescence is a developmental stage in which friends and peers can act as contributing factors that can lead to the participation in criminal activity. This is supported by Mkhondo (2005) as well as Leve and Chamberlain (2004) who believe that there are other factors that can contribute to the development of delinquent behaviour such as school and peer-based socialisation factors –

literature that is consistent with this study's findings as some participant's revealed peer pressure to be influential in the development of their disruptive behaviour. Therefore, in spite of the above themes and sub-themes indicating how these juvenile delinquent's perceived aspects of their family lives to have contributed to the development of their offending behaviour, this section highlights the areas of contestation that contradict these findings. Although the family plays a huge role in the child's development, it is not the only factor that impacts on an individual's behaviour. This is supported by Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) as well as Palmay and Moat (2002) who state that although the family is emphasised as one of the contributing factors, it is not the only factor that will subsequently result in a young person being involved in crime and violence. Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) go on to state that adverse outcomes such as criminal behaviour result from multiple and overlapping risk factors and thus the accumulation of risk is strongly related to adversity.

#### **4.5.4 Antisocial actions and inadequate supervision**

Another aspect that was taken into consideration by these participants, which they felt may have impacted on their delinquent behaviour, was the amount of supervision they were exposed to. Upon exploration, the researcher found that getting involved in criminal behaviour was attributed to insufficient regulation and control which seemed to be a regular occurrence within majority of these individual's daily lives as caregivers were unavailable and not present due to having to work long hours in order to maintain their income and to provide financially for their families. This was demonstrated by nine of the eleven participants as they divulged that their caregivers were not completely available in terms of providing sufficient guidance, support and supervision and thus they engaged in violent acts due to the vast amount of freedom they were granted as well insufficient guidelines or morals being provided. Consequently due to their unavailability, these excerpts exhibit how these caregivers are unable to provide these juveniles with regular guidance and support:

**P3:** *I live with my uncle and he works from six o'clock in the morning to eight o'clock at night. It is a long day and I can see him on his weekends only.*

- P4:** *Ja...because the only time that we can talk to our mother is on the weekend because on the weekdays if we talk to her then she is offish and so we have to wait to sort problems out with her.*
- P6:** *My mom and dad leave at half past six and come home at half past five and so I have to look after myself during the day.*
- P9:** *I come and stayed here by my granny's houses because the school was here and then my parents would come and pick me up at five o'clock and would drop me here in the morning again. It was only on the weekends that I would actually be with my parents and spend the afternoons or nights with them...*

Further, participant five states that even though his father is a school teacher by profession which allows him to be at home in the afternoons, his father is so preoccupied with his daily stress and his work that this individual often feels ignored and overlooked by his father. This results in him frequently having to fend for himself:

- P5:** *Sometimes (sighs)...it is like I talk to my dad and he is like staring, staring in to space and then I will be like 'Dad?' and he will be like 'oh ja...talk'...in such a way as that and I just walk away as I feel he is preoccupied with work and not listening to me.*

As indicated above, these participants indicate how they only have access to their caregivers on the weekends, thus indicating the lack of supervision or support that they endure during the week. Due to these caregivers unavailability on weekdays, these children are expected to care and fend for themselves as their caregivers are not available to provide adequate rules, boundaries or discipline. The following participants disclosed how such unavailable supervision specifically related to the nature of their crimes they committed:

- P2:** *I wanted to see what would happen because I have seen sex on TV. But there was no one to talk to about what I saw because my gran was not at the house...*

**P10:** *We came to this programme because of New Years Eve...My mom and them were away on holiday as they had gone to Durban and so it was just me and my brother and we went to a friend's house for a party...*

Both of these participants revealed that at the time that their criminal acts were conducted, their caregivers were unavailable. These statements illustrate the lack of supervision these offenders were exposed to as they were left unattended where no supervision or guidance was available to them. The above excerpts further point out how inadequate supervision and poor monitoring may have resulted in these individuals committing their specific crimes. This demonstrates the reliability of Palmary and Moat's (2002) statement suggesting that parents and caregivers experience social circumstances which require them to spend much of their time on activities other than childcare. This may result in many children being susceptible to connection with criminal behaviour or deviant peers affiliation as no other coping mechanisms are available to them (Palmary & Moat, 2002).

According to Simons et al (2005) as well as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) the most desired type of parenting involves taking an authoritative stance where a firm set of rules should be established and communicated to the individual. This involves encouraging and being involved in which peer's the child affiliates with, places that are considered off-limits as well as curfews and when the child should be home from school (Simons et al, 2005; Regoli & Hewitt, 1994). These participants perceived themselves as not having been exposed to this kind of monitoring and control by their caregivers as majority of them communicated that they were often unattended throughout the day which resulted in them often affiliating with deviant peers after school and caregivers being unaware of their whereabouts. This is further emphasised in their statements below:

**P3:** *If it is after seven and I am not by the house, then they will phone me and ask where I am.*

**P4:** *Yes...because most of the time my mother and her friends spend time together at home and so because she was spending time with them there was not a lot of time I could spend with my mother and maybe... when her friends come she would give us*

*money and then we would go to the movies where we would stay there for the whole day until six or half past six and then we would come back home.*

**P8:** *She does not make a lot of rules. I do not have to ask my mom I can just go but I have to come back at seven o'clock...*

Thus it is evident that these participants are exposed to ineffective monitoring by their caregivers as they go unsupervised in the afternoons following school where caregivers seem unaware of the activities that their children are involved in with their friends. They also do not seem to be available to provide assistance when their children need recommendations and coping mechanisms when dealing with problematic or difficult situations. This is also evidenced by Palmary and Moat (2002) who identified how nearly 40% of children were left without any supervision during the day, resulting in many of these children being vulnerable to abuse or involvement with deviant peers. Thus, in addition to directly increasing the risk of conduct problems, Simons et al (2005) highlight that inadequate parental involvement and supervision increases the probability of child antisocial behaviour indirectly by enhancing the chances of affiliation with deviant peers.

Furthermore, due to parental transitions or a family member having to work in another location due to poor socioeconomic circumstances, these participants demonstrate how they engaged in delinquent activities as the disrupted living circumstances further impacted on their exposure to inadequate supervision and monitoring.

**P3:** *My mom phones me and talks to me and asks me about my problems but we do not have time together...*

**P4:** *No...me and my dad we can talk on the phone and when he comes we can sit down and talk.*

**P10:** *I have always understood that she can not give me alone attention because my brother and my sister and them also go through things in their lives. Ja...so she can help me when she can you see...because she is one and we are seven...*

These participants demonstrate how disruptions in their family settings has not allowed them access to a caregiver as they reside in another location or overcrowded circumstances

which prevent them from gaining attention and supervision from their caregiver. As indicated above, parental advice and assistance can only be provided by the absent caregiver via telephonic interactions or is not provided at all due to congested living circumstances where the caregiver does not have the emotional resources to respond to all of her child's needs. As a result, these participants found it easier to engage with peers that enforced this sense of belonging and guidance, however this led to their involvement in deviant activities. Thus from these excerpts it is apparent that coming from a dysfunctional family may result in the further deprivation of supervision. This is supported by Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) who specify that the disorganisation and decline of the family can lead to increases in the likelihood that young members of the family go unsupervised and may not receive orders or regulation, resulting in several of these delinquents seeking socialisation and regulation on the streets. Therefore it is evident from the above that poor monitoring does put one at greater risk for problem behaviours and thus can be seen as an influencing factor as under-supervised children are more likely to participate in delinquency.

#### **4.5.5 Harsh and strict discipline and criminality**

Despite being exposed to poor monitoring or a lack of supervision, a vast amount of participants went on to disclose the strict and rigid rules that their caregivers imposed upon them and its impact on their delinquency. This at times is conducted by the same caregiver or by an alternative caregiver within the family structure. Thus, when discussing what they perceived to have influenced their antisocial actions, the participants below explained the stern and inflexible disciplining methods that they have been exposed to:

**P5:** *Sometimes they do judge me, like they do not want me to go far away from home – they want me to be around the house and not to go out onto the street. There is too much pressure at home...and I feel like my parents are always watching me...*

**P6:** *They will make me clean when I get home like maybe they will send me to go and wash the dishes or to put my father's plate in the kitchen and to give him water to drink...And also my big brother is always feeling that I have to take care of the little one always...sometimes I have to cook even if it is not my time to cook. Sometimes they make me do all the chores in the house and then when I tell them that my*

*bigger brother has to wash the dishes then my father says 'no, you must wash the dishes because you were not by the house the whole day' and so the rules are very strict and I feel that I am not allowed to do anything wrong or anything fun and that I have to be home, studying, cleaning and cooking all the time...*

**P7:** *When you come from school first thing was you do your homework and when your homework is done then you go to the farm there by the vegetables and you work there and then you are home by four. Then you had to go and wash everything and your room had to be clean.*

From the descriptions above, it seems that these participant's caregivers exercised strict control in the absence of warmth and support. This is evidenced as most of these participants were expected to perform activities and chores within their home environment without getting any love, encouragement or support for their participation in these household duties – but instead strict rules and restrictions were implemented. Thus the underlying feelings of hostility and frustration are communicated by these participants and subsequently were only able to express such emotions through their enactment of criminal behaviour. This is supported by Simons et al (2005) as well as McCord (1999) who state that such unbending living situations may lead to the production of opposition and defiance in their children as they tend to perceive their surrounding environment in a hostile manner. This is further supported by Bischof et al (1995) who found that delinquent families were more bound to rules and procedures in structuring day-to-day family life.

When describing further reasons as to why the discipline within their family environment contributed to their criminal demeanour, some participants described how they were also exposed to aggressive and even physical forms of discipline:

**P6:** *When my father got home he called me to the toilet and told me that I must come and pick up my clothes and then he locked the door and started hitting me. He hit me badly because I had bruises everywhere. Sometimes he beats me until he gets tired. Sometimes I stand up to him and try to hold his hands away from me. And every time that my dad beats me I tell my mom to make it stop but she encourages my dad to go on and does not listen to me.*

- P7:** *After school my gran was there and she liked screaming. And so we would come in the house and we would have to sit and mustn't mess or nothing and then you had to sit and do your homework, eat and only then could you go and play. She had the house under control because anything that we do in the house she knows about it. She was the one that used to hit me but only when I was naughty.*
- P8:** *My mom hits us with the belt if we have done something wrong. If I tell my dad that I have done something wrong then he will beat me physically – he will beat us with his hands and slap us.*

It is evident from these excerpts that these individuals were exposed to aggressive and violent means of discipline and punishment and once again, teaching these offenders that aggressive acts are a means of punishing as well as expressing angry and uncomfortable emotions. Thus, these participants underwent punishment which resulted in their caregivers demonstrating a need to exert extreme control as this was conducted in a forceful and even physical manner. Such severe and aggressive punishment from these caregivers were perceived as contributing factors that lead to the onset of aggressive and violent behaviour in these young participants.

This is sustained by Mkhondo (2005) as it is described that by punishing severely and inconsistently, caregivers may stimulate the child's anger and subsequently provides their children with a model of aggressive behaviour. Parents who do not provide positive encouragement for the child but instead utilise physical forms of punishment, teach the child that aggression is utilised to represent uncomfortable feelings as opposed to teaching them that verbalising their anger in words can be employed rather than in physical attacks (Mkhondo, 2005). Thus, under these conditions van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) indicate how children tend to model parental control styles, including aggressive behaviour, and consequently adopting them as a means of exerting control in a disempowering environment. Such descriptions from these participants as well as the supporting theory indicate how harsh, rigid and even physical discipline can have a detrimental impact on the development of an individual and its contribution to delinquent behaviour.

#### **4.5.6 Inconsistent discipline and volatility**

When committing immoral or incorrect acts, these offenders revealed how their caregivers did not teach them adequately about the wrong nature of their behaviour. This was either done through not receiving any form of discipline, or the original method of regulation being withdrawn. Thus, these participants did not seem to acknowledge the consequences of their deviant behaviour due to the inconsistent discipline provided by their caregivers, and thus was perceived as an influencing factor in the formation of their volatile and criminal behaviour. The following participants, when relating to what may have impacted on their juvenile delinquency, unveiled the inconsistent discipline that they were exposed to as their caregivers tended to offer contradictory messages in response to their incorrect behaviour:

- P2:** *You know when my mother gets angry then she will shout and shout and then she feels sorry for me and apologises.*
- P9:** *Like maybe if I did wrong then they will be cross with me...and then they can sometimes shout at me or else they will keep quiet for a day or so and then they will start speaking to me again.*
- P11:** *Sometimes my mother gets angry with me but then the next day she will say sorry she was tired.*

These statements indicate how these individuals do not have consistent messages of discipline communicated to them. Some are exposed to anger and shouting, however this is withdrawn in the form of an apology resulting in these individuals not learning the consequences of their behaviour. Furthermore, the other participant was either ignored or shouted at, but these methods of inconsistency were failing to provide this individual with mechanisms to interpret what is wrong or what is right. They attributed such methods of inconsistency to their criminal involvement.

Participant five demonstrates how before he was committed of a crime his parents used to be easy-going and allowed him a large amount of freedom in which he was able to associate with deviant peers. However since his offence they have begun to exert extreme rules upon him:

**P5:** *It is since this thing happened because before my parents were like whatever and were easy and now they are so strict and I do not feel free. Like say I am out then I will go back to the house and I will tell them...okay...I will be back at home at ten and do not worry because I have my key and they will say it is fine... But now if I tell them that I will be back at ten then they will tell me 'no you cannot go out that late and you must be back at eight'.*

Thus, prior to his criminal offence, this participant's caregivers had a lack of restrictions and allowed this boy to fend for himself and conduct his own desirable behaviour which consequently led to his volatile behaviour. However, once sentenced and accused of a violent act, this participant is under harsh and rigid observation – communicating conflicting messages to this offender. In addition to this, participants went on to reveal how they believed their delinquency came about as a result of the ineffective disciplinary methods conducted by their caregivers as no punishment was carried out:

**P3:** *My mom did not shout or hit me; she would just make some laughs and jokes...*

**P7:** *My uncle is not often by the house and he does not discipline me in any way. He is like...how can I say...if you do something wrong he will just look at you like nothing has happened and will not really say anything...*

**P9:** *A few weeks ago I was in an accident and my mother said that I mustn't worry about it as she will pay the excess...and I must not stress about things...*

The methods of discipline carried out by these caregivers seemed inappropriate and unsuccessful. They did not take into consideration the extent of the misbehaviour and reacted with no concern and thus communicated to the relevant participant that they do not have to acknowledge the consequences and impact of their negative behaviour. Thus, it was perceived by these participants that they were able to participate in misconduct as the inadequate and ineffectual form of discipline which they were exposed to, communicated that they were not at fault when engaging in such acts of misbehaviour. This is further illustrated with participant 11 as the nature of the discipline did not seem effective for the nature of the participant's behaviour:

**P11:** *My mother did not punish me; she will always tell me not to do it and then I must learn what not to do. Even after the stabbing I went to my mom to ask her if she is angry at me and she says she is not angry at me but she did tell me that I mustn't do that and I mustn't walk with a knife.*

This individual committed a violent act that was inappropriate as well as illegal – and a behaviour that deserved adequate punishment and supervision. However, from this excerpt it demonstrates the ineffective stance that his caregiver adopted and thus not educating this participant on the negative effects of his behaviour or the implication such an offence has on other individuals. Thus, in addition to poor monitoring, the participants illustrated patterns of inconsistent as well as ineffective disciplinary methods which they perceived as contributing to their acting out behaviour. This is evidenced by Regoli and Hewitt (1994) who indicate that if incorrect behaviour is not followed up by actual or adequate punishment it may cause an increase in defiant behaviour rather than a decrease. This is further evidenced by Patterson (1997) as cited in Mbhele (2003) who emphasise that the role of unskilful management practices can act as a reinforcer of coercive behaviour and thus may further influence the development of antisocial behaviour in childhood.

#### **4.5.7 Adequate discipline in the family**

In contradiction to the above findings, some participants felt they were exposed to adequate forms of regulation and thus did not perceive the disciplinary methods imposed by their families to have impacted on their criminal behaviour. This is evidenced by McCord (1999) who states that families in which consistent non-punitive disciplinary methods as well as the presence of consistent regulation and supervision take place are considered to be protective factors in preventing an individual from engaging in criminal behaviour. In correlation with these findings, some participants within this study believed that they have been subjected to adequate disciplinary methods. This is illustrated in the excerpts below:

**P2:** *My uncle will talk to me and tell me what I did was wrong.*

**P4:** *My mother will shout at us and takes away our privileges like giving us money everyday and allowing us to eat food at the tuck shop and she usually makes us stay*

*home and clean or wash dishes...ja...mostly she shouts at us and tells us what we did wrong.*

**P8:** *When I do anything wrong then my mother will tell me that I mustn't do that thing. She always takes care of me. She tells me what time I must come home by the house.*

These participants were provided with an adequate method of discipline as their caregivers reasoned with them in a loving and supportive manner by setting firm rules as opposed to punishing or threatening them. Therefore, the above statements reveal that some of these individuals had a family member that imposed sufficient disciplinary methods upon them. Thus they received what Simons et al (2005), Mkhondo (2005) as well as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) refer to as authoritative parenting, which is firm control combined with the presence of warmth and support and allowing one to understand the consequences of their behaviour – an approach to parenting that discourages and serves to deter the development of conduct problems and offending behaviour. Thus, some participants indicate that even though they were exposed to healthy disciplinary methods, they still engaged in faulty and deviant behaviour, and therefore indicating that discipline that is carried out in the family cannot be considered in isolation when attempting to understand what influences the development of criminal behaviour.

#### **4.5.8 The adult role of the juvenile delinquent**

A further area of contestation looks at the adult roles and responsibilities that these juvenile delinquents had to adopt from an early age. Kass (2007) highlights how often the child who adopts the role of an adult during their childhood, feels restricted and unable to freely explore their environment as they are consumed with being perfect and an inability to make mistakes. Thus, in general, majority of parentified children become responsible and perform well in all aspects of their lives (Kass, 2007). However in the case of this research, these participants felt that they grew up too quickly in family environments that fostered a large amount of frustration, and therefore were only able to release these feelings of aggravation by committing an antisocial act. This is supported by Kass (2007) who state that when the burden becomes far too enormous for the child to bear, it can lead to frustration and self-doubt because they feel incompetent to do what is expected of them and

may consequently result in an individual engaging in criminal behaviour. Specific to this study, many of the participants described their juvenile delinquency as a result of the responsibility they had to adopt from a very young age in doing all the housework, cooking, shopping as well as caring for younger siblings:

**P3:** *I am looking after my little brother like when he eats breakfast and I maybe have to help him wash his body.*

**P6:** *I have to clean and take care of my little brother and his cousin...*

**P7:** *Well my brother was still a bit younger and so I had to look after him and I had to clean the house. I am the eldest in the house and I look after my brother so anything that happens to him I am responsible for it.*

**P8:** *If our helper is not there then we clean the house and take my little sister to preschool. We come back and play soccer, eat and then come back and bath and at four or half past four we will fetch our little sister.*

**P11:** *By the time she comes home from work I would have finished putting on the rice and rinsing it off and then my mom arrives home and will make the gravy. I started helping her cook and clean from when I was small still up until now – doing things that a husband would do and I like it.*

These participants reveal how they are conducting the roles and responsibilities of an adult as not only do these activities incorporate regular chores, but involve partaking in deeds that are required to be carried out by adults and caregivers. Other participants felt that they had to take on an adult responsibility due to their parents being unavailable or forcing them to take on the liability that a parent should in order to fulfil their parent's emotional needs:

**P1:** *I do not like to give me mom stress and I like to protect her. My mother wants me to stop them fighting and when I stop them then he wants to fight with me now...*

**P8:** *My dad used to beat up my mom and so my little sister and my little brother – I felt sorry for them because they were crying when they were shouting at each other. They were small at the time as so I had to take them to the bedroom and stay with them.*

**P10:** *Me and my mom do not talk...I just could not open up to her. Because even though I am still hurt I know that she is still hurting and bringing it up... I do not want to especially not after what she went through with my dad so I would not want to bring anything up.*

The above statements indicate how children of a young age were required to take on housework as well as emotional responsibility that should be conducted by an adult. These offenders illustrate how they tend to contain their own emotions of frustration and pain in order to protect their caregiver and consequently resulting in them being infected by these unbearable feelings. Due to having to adopt such huge responsibilities from such an early age, Kass (2007) highlights how this can interfere in a child's healthy development. These participants portrayed such disruptions in their behaviour as they felt they were expected to contain such intolerable responsibilities and emotions which may have been difficult to endure and consequently impacted on their involvement in criminal acts.

This is further illustrated by these participants as they identified how they were often expected to fulfil the role of the absent parent which later contributed to their acting out behaviour. This is supported by Bischof et al (1992) who identified the possibility of the juvenile offender's family to be over-involved, enmeshed, with diffuse internal boundaries, and closed external boundaries. Bischof et al (1992) reported that these offenders rely on their family as do their families rely on them almost solely for support and can be regarded as socially isolated, indicating that extreme cohesion or intensive emotional bonding that the family members have toward one another, can be seen as an influencing factor that may lead to the development of the offending juvenile. Although not a predominant theme, whilst discussing what they perceived to contribute to their involvement in offending behaviour, four members of the study revealed over-involved relationships with their caregiver as illustrated in the quotes below:

**P4:** *Sometimes me and my mother, we might sleep in the same bed when my brother is not there...*

**P7:** *Like me I will always hug her and hold her whilst we talk and we always talk and we laugh...everything... And I will put my arm around her when we sit and talk and*

*also when we go to the shop I will put it around her as I like protecting her. And she is very involved in my life, like I say, everything that I do, like if I do something she wants to know about it or if I want to go somewhere she will ask me what am I going to be doing or with who am I going to be with and all sorts of stuff...*

**P11:** *Me...I am my mother's boyfriend and I feel good, good without a dad.*

These statements illustrate the diffuse internal boundaries within these individual's families as these children seem to be adopting a parentified role as they take on responsibilities and behaviours that should be carried out by a boyfriend or husband. Participant 11 goes on to reveal the intensity of his relationship with his mother:

**P11:** *She did always worry about where I am and did always want me around her... She does not want me away on weekends and does not want me to play; she just wants me to be around her... Like to go with her to the shops and to go with her to my aunties and to play with my cousins...My mother did always tell me that when she comes home from work I must be at home because you know when she comes home from work and now I must go the shop for her and if I am not there, there is no one. I am the only one because it is just me and my mom...*

This participant refers to the extreme nature of his relationship with his mother as he was unable to be with friends or play independently as she requested his presence and attention at all times. Therefore, the above participants demonstrate to a certain degree how at times their mothers require them to take on the role of their 'husbands' or 'partners'. All of these participants reveal a need to look after and care for their mothers that seems to exceed the responsibility that a child would take in providing love and care toward a parent as they are expected to take on the surrogate partner for their parent. This is indicated specifically by participant seven and 11 where one can see that they have become socially isolated as their mother requires their full attention and may be to the detriment of their healthy development emotionally as well as socially. Therefore, these responses indicate how their family systems can be seen as socially isolating as some participants were limited to socialising within the family system and unable to explore external relationships freely and without restriction.

This reveals that there is a certain degree of over-involved relationships amongst these participants which could contribute to their criminal behaviour. Although this is just speculation into what may lead to the development of antisocial behaviour, Bischof et al (1995) found that the families of these offenders were often either very rigid and enmeshed, or very chaotic with a great deal of role confusion.

Thus, a lot of these participants perceived their involvement in criminal behaviour to be as a result of having to adopt a parental role from an early age indicating that they were expected to be responsible for a large amount of things that perhaps developmentally they were unable to cope with. This is verified by Bischof et al (1992) as they demonstrated that the juvenile offender may be situated within a family system that was very chaotic with a great deal of role reversal and inadequate responsibility being placed on the child. This was further supported by Koch and Wood (2002) as well as Saradjian (1996) who emphasised that offenders often perceived themselves as not having been parented by anyone as they had to accept the role and responsibility of ‘the carer’ – the result being a dysfunctional family system that discourages or prevents healthy development amongst its members.

#### **4.6 THEME THREE: JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND FAMILY EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT**

Emotional involvement is described by Bischof et al (1992) as the “*degree to which family members are separated from or connected to their family and is defined as the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another*” (p. 318). The presence of a warm and loving family characterised by good interpersonal relationships and parent-child interactions is what Palmay and Moat (2002) as well as Regoli and Hewitt (1994) believe necessary to provide resilience to young individuals from participating in criminal activities. On the contrary, disregard or rejection by parents as well as a lack of communication or refusal to acknowledge emotions are all predictors that may influence an individual engaging in problematic behaviour (Mkhondo, 2005; Katsiyannis et al, 2004; Mercy et al, 2002; McCord, 1999; Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1998; Regoli & Hewitt, 1994; Bischof et al, 1992). The participants within this study ranged from being subjected to emotionally unavailable families to ones that had rigid and

enmeshed boundaries. Furthermore, the level of family communication as well as family connectivity were deemed valuable themes that these individuals referred to when describing their reasons for participating in criminal acts. These will be explored below in order to ascertain whether these factors were perceived by these juvenile delinquents to have impacted on the development of their devious behaviours.

#### **4.6.1 Emotionally uninvolved family relationships**

When describing how they perceived their families to have influenced their criminal demeanour, participants that resided in both nuclear families as well as single-headed households described the emotional unavailability of their caregivers. Participant six in particular felt that neither of his parents were supportive or caring as they offered very little interest in his daily activities and thus attributed this to his acting out behaviour.

When looking at the nuclear families of participant five as well as participant nine, they both indicated that their parents were supportive, however this seemed to be in more of a physical manner rather than emotionally:

- P5:** *Well there are certain things...like this thing of going to court like taking me there, having a new date and taking me back for another appearance on a Monday or a Tuesday or whenever. They always go with me – both of them and they will take the day off or say they are sick from work or they will do something to go with me to court as they like to hear what is going on.*
- P9:** *My parents have supported me a lot; seriously my parents have supported me a lot. Like now with my case – there my parents have supported me a lot. They even stayed out of work just to come to court and things.*

These participants felt that their parents provided them with support as they attended their court cases. However these participants seem to indicate that although their caregivers were present during their court trials, and escorted them to their sentencing; they did not illustrate any feelings of being emotionally contained by their available caregivers. Thus, the fact that they felt physically supported by their parents but not emotionally supported was evident as both participant five and nine linked this to their criminal behaviour as they

later went on to reveal how they experienced their families to be emotionally unavailable. This is highlighted in the quotes below:

- P5:** *My dad and mother only speak to me when I am having school problems...and that's about it.*
- P9:** *Say my dad shouts at me, he will say he does not want or love me and is not going to be there. He will not help me and he still does not...*

Both participants indicate that although their parents are physically available, their inability to provide them with understanding, warmth, love and emotional support fosters feelings of rejection as the underlying message portrayed in these quotes is one of unavailability and dismissal. Perhaps in order to thwart such unbearable feelings, these participants may engage in criminal behaviour with deviant peer groups in order to receive acknowledgement elsewhere as it was not being provided within the family environment.

These feelings were also illustrated by the other offenders who came from a disrupted family environment. These participants began to describe their delinquency in the context of absent caregivers whose unavailable relationships communicate distance, conflict as well as a lack of warmth and support. This is illustrated in the excerpts below:

- P3:** *My mom has got a problem...so if I did something bad or want to talk to her it is better that I do not talk to her, because she has got a problem with her blood pressure. So I will go and speak to my uncle because for a long time me and my mom have not been living together.*
- P7:** *My dad...he does not have any patience and feels we are always wrong so he moved away to another place and since I was small I have not lived with him. I used to worry when I was young as I used to think about how it would be to have a father.*
- P10:** *My dad has never been involved or supportive...not even on a birthday...not even a phone call to wish me happy birthday whatsoever. And I do not know him – I only know him from photos. He just left us like that you know...like we were nothing to him.*

The responses from these participants indicate the anger and rejection they experienced due to the physical as well as emotional unavailability of their primary caregiver. Participant one goes on to illustrate how these feelings of rejection, neglect and abandonment directly contributed to his involvement in offending behaviour:

**P1:** *I come from a very bad life with my father leaving us when we were small and that is why I came to do all these criminal things. I do not want to talk to him as he was not there for all my life and I feel like he really let me down and it makes me really feel angry with him as he left when I was two or three years old and we were all left with my mom alone...*

Therefore, from the above statements it can be established that these individuals feel extremely rejected and neglected by their absent caregivers. These participants seem to feel that not only are their caregivers physically absent, but they are unavailable to provide support, love or even comfort which fosters a sense of not belonging to a nuclear family. It is these feelings of neglect, rejection and abandonment that arose from within their family settings that these participants perceived as contributing to their criminal behaviour.

These feelings were further emphasised as participants also mentioned the emotional unavailability of their primary caregiver in the form of a single-parent due to extreme working conditions or overcrowding and how it impacted on their sense of worthiness:

**P1:** *My mother has a lot of things on her mind... She has to be in everybody's lives you see. She has to support each and every one of us... So that is why what she does give me, I appreciate.*

**P3:** *My uncle works long hours and I can see him on the weekends only. Sometimes I cannot talk to my uncle about my problems when he is tired and then he will come in and just sleep. When you see him he will come into the house and he will eat and sleep and will say 'do not talk to me because I am tired'. So me I know when he is tired and when he is tired I will leave him to sleep.*

**P4:** *The communication between me and my mom is not very good because most of the time we will not talk. This is because sometimes she is busy with work or maybe*

*she is on the phone and then she will say that she is getting tired and goes to bed at eight o'clock... I feel she is too busy because the only time that we can talk to her is on the weekend because on the week days if we talk to her she is offish and so we have to wait to sort out problems with her.*

**P10:** *There have been things that she hasn't been able to give to us because she is a mother of seven you know... like she cannot divide herself into half and give one all of the attention and not the other... So far I know there are things that I knew she tried to give me but if she could not she would explain to me why and then I would understand why she cannot. Probably now and then I feel like I did not get enough attention or whatsoever...*

Thus, although these participants feel that their one caregiver provided them with as much as possible, to a certain degree they felt that they were unable to offer them support, nurturance and availability which often resulted in them affiliating with deviant peers in order to obtain support from outside the deprived family environment. This is specifically illustrated by Standing (2005) who states that often individuals join gangs to obtain a sense of belonging that was absent within their family settings that were alternatively shaped by neglect and rejection. This is specifically described by participant six who stated that although he was provided with everything that he needed materialistically, he was subjected to emotionally unavailable primary caregivers that resulted in feelings of rejection and abandonment:

**P6:** *It is upsetting sometimes because there are times when I feel unwanted in the family; like I do not belong there and I am just invisible. They also do not listen to what problems I have and what problems I go through and what issues I have to deal with. They only just want to know about things at school.*

When talking about what may have impacted on his antisocial demeanour, this participant illustrated how he experienced his caregivers as devoid of love to the extent that he felt unacknowledged and unseen. Similar to all other quotes indicated above, these participants demonstrated enormous feelings of being dismissed and emotionally deserted. Thus, from the above statements it can be seen how participants perceived aspects of their family lives

to be rejecting and neglectful, despite the fact that they view the relationship with their available caregiver as significant. As a result, these participants may have revolved into offenders as they are described by Bowlby (1973) to be hostile in interactions with others, developing a poor sense of self-esteem accompanied by the notion of egocentricity, and demonstrating little empathy accompanied by a display of aggression towards others. These criminal behaviours were demonstrated by participants as they believed that everyone was against them, including their caregivers in addition to constantly being afraid that they were not achieving sufficiently. McWilliams (1994) continues to describe how the antisocial person has simply never been able to attach psychologically, incorporate good objects or identify with unavailable caregivers resulting in this individual being unable to take in love. This is demonstrated perfectly by participant ten as he stated the following:

**P10:** *Last year I did not know who I was anymore. Because I was a very angry person...I could not communicate with anybody because of like my whole past and I did not know myself and I would get so angry and did not speak to anyone...It was very painful because I could not be a happy person... You know I was very aggressive, very angry...you know...I would blame anybody who would try to be nice to me and whatsoever you know...I could not be able to make friends and whatsoever...as I would just be rude to people...and I would not trust anybody that would try to say to me 'let me help you' or whatever...because I would not feel safe around them.*

Thus, due to feelings of rejection and neglect, this participant revealed how he lost a sense of self as he felt unable to attach to anyone emotionally and further contributed to his aggressive behaviour. As a result he was unable to take in love that was offered from those in his surrounding environment. These findings coincide with Bischof et al (1995) who state that delinquents view their families as less supportive than do normative families. This is further supported as another theme derived from the interviews was the belief that the provision of emotional needs by parents is often sufficed through the provision of financial or materialistic things. When questioned about how they perceive their parents to provide them with love and support, majority of the participants revealed that this comes in the form of financial awards and materialistic possessions. Although they did not

recognise this as a contributing factor in their development of crime, it further emphasised the emotional unavailability that they were subjected to, which may result in further feelings of neglect and loneliness. This is reflected in the following statements:

- P2:** *When I was crying my dad bought me a lot...a lot of presents but I do not remember being able to talk to him or anything else.*
- P3:** *My uncle and my mother did a birthday for my young brother and they did not do one for me. It was fine because he buys clothes for me just to cool me down. He did it to make me happy and calm my mind.*
- P4:** *A lot of the time when my dad comes – he comes and buys me lots of things and puts money into my account.*
- P8:** *My dad is not really involved in my life because when he comes; he comes and takes us out maybe to the malls to buy us clothes or we will eat lunch there or maybe we go to his place or to his brothers place and then he will take us back home and that is all. We do not talk a lot...ja...we do not talk a lot about our life. So he is not really there for us. He gives us lots of money but he talks a little bit to us and we need him to support us to find out about us and to know what is going on – not just to give us money.*

When looking at these results, one can assume that although these individuals are appreciative for the material things that they receive from their caregivers, the underlying desire that is communicated in the above statements is for their parent's attention, involvement and emotional availability. This is evident as almost all of the participants indicated that they would prefer their parents to be more involved and to talk with them, instead of providing them with materialistic items and thus, demonstrating a longing for their parent's involvement. Moreover, these findings indicate that the expressions of emotions within these families are dealt with via the provision of material objects rather than through emotional connectivity – a finding that may lead to one's involvement in crime and delinquency. This is due to reports from Bischof et al (1995) who state that delinquent groups generally characterise their families to be considerably less expressive resulting in an inability to express feelings in a healthy manner but which are converted into anger outbursts and consequently aggressive behaviour.

Such experiences of emotional unavailability seem to have manifested feelings of being unloved, worthless, unhappy and unworthy of accomplishment in these participants. As a result a vast amount of feelings were identified amongst the participant's as being present throughout their emotionally neglected lives. Anger, aggression and a need to fight were experienced by majority of these participants and thus attributed to their involvement in violent acts. They often described how these feelings were carried out in aggressive acts or in the form of impatience or irritability:

- P1:** *I have seen my mother getting beaten by my dad and my brother's getting beaten by my dad as well as him leaving us and sometimes my heart will get sore but I am mostly angry...I am angry at mostly my dad.*
- P6:** *My mom and my dad will start shouting at me and it makes me cry because I have a soft spot. So when you say something horrible to me it effects me fast and it makes me cry and I get very angry and I feel like fighting and I have a short temper...*
- P10:** *When I get angry I guess I will cry or I will take a walk to spend time with myself and I do not allow anyone to pick it up. I am angry about my father as he just left us like that you know...like we are nothing...like we are just people to him and not family.*

Although these participants demonstrated a predominant and primary feeling of anger and aggression, upon further exploration, these excerpts uncovered more predominant feelings of hurt, pain and sadness due to overwhelming feelings of loneliness, feeling unwanted and unsupported. These feelings can be attributed to being seen as inadequate, neglected, rejected and abandoned resulting in perceptions of being unloved and invisible. Other participants were just able to identify anger as their predominant feelings:

- P9:** *If somebody attacks me in my face or attacks who I am or undermines me then I get angry.*
- P11:** *It is when I stand up from bed and it's like...I do not want to talk...I do not feel like going to work...Ja...I do not want to talk. Because when I stand up I feel angry and aggressive because I do not want to stand up...I am still tired...I do not want to talk to no one just for that time until I am calm again.*

Thus, whether angry or illustrating pain, hurt and frustration, majority of these participants experience such extreme feelings as a result of the neglect and abandonment they are exposed to from one or more caregivers and therefore are seen as contributing to their acting out behaviour. Katsiyannis et al (2004) demonstrated this as juvenile offenders often perceive themselves as not having received sympathy, protection, feelings of love or reassurance from other people, especially their caregivers and in this study primarily from a father figure, and thus generally experience a lower need for approval or support from others, which seems to give an indication of the tendency to develop poor relationships, mistrust and disengagement.

As found in a study conducted by Mkhondo (2005), loneliness and emptiness are ubiquitous emotions in the lives of juvenile offenders due to some of them being rejected, abandoned and neglected – findings that parallel the experiences and emotions of the offenders within this study. So, although when asked what feelings they experience, which resulted in the reply of *'happy'*, as the participants went on to disclose various aspects surrounding their family lives and its constitution, a vast amount of negative and painful emotions began to arise. Although the predominant underlying feelings were of rejection, abandonment, hurt and pain – majority of these individuals masked these feelings in the form of anger where they indicated a need to fight or participate in substance use. Thus although not an overt finding, underlying feelings of hurt and sadness seem to be unexpressed by majority of these individuals, resulting in the formation of angry and aggressive feelings which are expressed and released in the form of destructive behaviour. Mkhondo (2005) sustains this pattern of behaviour within these youth by explaining how their experiences of loneliness and emptiness may result in feelings of powerlessness, where no identity can be formed and feelings of being invisible as opposed to being recognised as important individuals may be experienced, and as a result can lead to a need for protection, for belonging, and for security-feelings, which they felt they could only achieve through their participation in criminal activities.

#### **4.6.2 Under-involved family relationships due to a lack of communication**

Due to experiencing family environments that were emotionally deprived, an immense amount of participants in this study revealed how they experienced a lack of

communication within their family environments when describing what contributed to their delinquency. This deficient use of communication appears to not only occur within the parent-child interaction but also takes place amongst sibling relationships and consequently impacts on the cohesiveness of the family which in turn can lead to one's involvement in delinquency. The following quotes aim to emphasize these findings:

- P7:** *Just in the beginning of an argument my mom and uncle will start to shout at each other but after that then they will start to ignore one another.*
- P9:** *Look, I feel like with some problems they do not want to talk about it and would rather avoid it and not talk about it. So when there is a problem in the family they just avoid one another and do not talk about it. They just avoid it for that period of time and maybe with time they will get to speak with each other but about different things so the way they deal with conflict is not right but instead should sit down and talk about things instead because when you are able to talk about what is wrong then you are able to solve it.*
- P10:** *Most of the times me and my mom do not talk or argue about things and do the same things but we have a loving and kind relationship. But just like I said earlier I just could not open up to her. Because even though I am still hurt I know that she is still hurt and bringing it up... I do not want to especially after what she went through with my dad so I would not want to bring anything up... So every now and then I forget about it like it is not there but there are times when it does come up but I cannot speak out to somebody so I rather cry because then it makes me feel better.*

All the above participants illustrate how conflictual situations or problematic circumstances and relationships cannot be discussed effectively within their family environments. Not only do they emphasize how no communication occurs following a disagreement but also demonstrate that difficult situations tend to be avoided and not dealt with in an appropriate manner. This consequently may result in family members attempting to hold a large amount of their uncontained feelings to themselves which may be later carried out in aggressive or delinquent acts. This is exhibited by participant two who indicates that the lack of communication present within his household prevented him from being taught adequate life skills and thus led to him engaging in unsafe sexual practices:

**P2:** *When I was sleeping with that girl I was not angry... I wanted to see what would happen because I have seen it on TV that thing. I saw it last year on TV and I was not knowing about it. And the girl did ask me to come and so I went with her and she took my pants off and so I took her pants off and then we sleep. Then her grandmother came and say 'what are you doing' and I got out of that house quickly and went home and the grandmother when to the police and said that boy raped my child but that girl said that we did not rape each other and we both agreed to sleep together. I did ask my mom about how does sex work and how do you do sex and she would say that only in years to come will she tell me about it – when I finished school and that I must have a house and get married and at that time you must have sex. She said I must not have it now because I am small and must not do strange things. So there was no one to talk about what I saw on TV.*

This participant reveals that the poor communication that was prevalent within his home environment led to his participation in criminal acts as he was unable to get an adequate understanding of what sexual practices entailed due to his caregivers avoiding explaining this phenomenon appropriately. This is supported by the prevailing view in the literature that states that juvenile delinquent's are often exposed to family relationships where the nature of these relationships – whether with their parents, caregivers or siblings – can be described as distant, conflictual or lacking in communication and devoid of love and warmth (Mkhondo, 2005). The lack of communication within the family was emphasised as problematic by the participants as it subsequently resulted in them being unable to express their feelings as well as being exposed to inadequate ways of resolving conflicting situations – and as participant two highlighted clearly, causing his involvement in crime due to a lack of communication. Other participants throughout their interviews described being very angry and aggressive but having no one to express these feelings with resulting in them resorting to insufficient methods of conflict resolution in the form of acting out. Therefore, a lack of communication amongst family members needs to be taken into account when attempting to establish what influences these individuals to become engaged in delinquent behaviour.

### 4.6.3 The emotionally available family

In contrast to the above sub-themes indicating how these juvenile delinquent's perceived their families to be emotionally unavailable and devoid of the ability to communicate efficiently and subsequently contributing to the development of their offending behaviour, this sub-theme highlights the areas of contestation that contradict these findings. This is evidenced as some of these offenders described the nature of their relationships with their available caregivers as extremely supportive and emotional available. This is indicated in the statements below:

- P1:** *My mom has missed out on nothing really...because she gave me love and that is all I wanted. She is not like my father who left us and ran away and gave us to the welfare you know...She stuck with us...*
- P3:** *My uncle asks me why today I look angry and then I can tell him. And when I am sick then I can tell him that I am sick today...He has always done only good things to me. And when I was going to court my uncle was there for me.*
- P7:** *I always go to my mother because she is like the only one that understands me you see... and how can I say... I can be honest with her and tell her the real story.*
- P11:** *My mother is always honest with me...she always shows me love and always puts a smile on her face for me...and I show her that back...I want to be as smart as she is.*

Thus instead of perceiving the emotional availability of their families as a contributing factor in their crime participation, these individuals portrayed their family in a protective light as they illustrated their favourable parent-child interactions in which love, respect, trust and support was apparent in these interpersonal relationships. Participant ten went on to reveal the support that his mother as well as foster father provide him with, even though they do not live together and provide for his needs separately:

- P10:** *Even when I am wrong or right you know – I will get love from both sides and whatever I am going through I will have them to fall back on and they will sit and listen to me you know...and they can even direct me if I am wrong or whatsoever. They are the type of loving parents that are understanding and they will not just take my word and side with me and judge the next person when they know I was*

*wrong and they will tell me what goes for what. They will never put me down or push me off because they do not love me; they love me and help me to be a better person and they are never negative about me whatsoever.*

Thus, all the above participants who resided with one caregiver as a result of a disruption within the family, described their available caregiver as extremely supportive, emotionally available and providing them with love, warmth, guidance and understanding and thus acting as a resilience factor in their antisocial development. Participant two felt that his surrounding nuclear family provided him with adequate love and attention.

**P2:** *My mother sometimes talked to me about how I feel and I told her that they hurt me with the things that they were doing at home and that when they fight I feel so angry. I feel like I could go and leave the house and my mother said okay and that she would never do it again. It is quite nice because me and my mom are able to talk to one another and to be honest with one another.*

This participant illustrates how he feels that his caregivers, specifically his mother, is openly available to him on an emotional level and therefore fostering a relationship that promotes openness, trust and connectivity. Furthermore, all the above findings demonstrate that the majority of these participants felt a sense of connectedness with one parental figure within their family settings. Therefore it is demonstrated from these findings that it is not necessarily the family's emotional involvement which acts as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour. So although some participants referred to their family's lack of emotional availability as well as a insufficient communication being influential in the formation of their criminal demeanour, this cannot be considered in isolation when attempting to identify what family factors lead to their involvement in crime. This is evidenced in this sub-theme as individual's exposed to a favourable amount of emotional support and involvement still engaged in offending behaviour and thus indicating the complex interplay that family factors as well as other external factors play in contributing to the development of antisocial behaviour.

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

Recent research in the area of juvenile delinquents has identified the family as a possible contributing factor in the development of antisocial behaviour. By utilising a qualitative research procedure this study attempted to examine how these juvenile offenders perceived their families to have influenced their participation in criminal acts. This involved an examination of specific aspects relating to the family, namely its structure, functioning, emotional expression and responsiveness as well trauma and how these family characteristics were perceived to have an impact on the development of these juvenile's criminal behaviour. From the analysis one can infer that the family may act as a contributing factor in the development of criminal behaviour. It was found that majority of the participants in the study had certain perceptions around the families influence on their criminal behaviour as well as other influencing factors that arose. Most noticeable in this regard were the topics of the different family forms that presented within these delinquent's settings, the dysfunctional family relationships, patterns and response styles, and the family's level of emotional involvement, and thus revealing that a complex interplay of these family characteristics may significantly contribute to the development of juvenile offending behaviour.

However, in contrast to the family being identified as a risk factor in the formation of this antisocial behaviour, areas of contestation also arose from participants' talk. Despite their delinquency and the potential contribution of the family, some participants identified the family to act as a protective factor and thus not influencing their involvement in criminal acts. Aside from the family, other influences such as peer groups and community violence were also identified as potential risk factors for juvenile delinquency. Therefore although an important contributing factor, the family cannot be considered in isolation when attempting to identify what may lead these juveniles to engage in criminal acts. Thus, in summary, this explorative study identified that although not the only factor, it appears that one can infer from the perceptions of these delinquent's that their experience within their family environments may be viewed as an influencing factor in the future course of their criminal development.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **5.1 CENTRAL FINDINGS**

The central findings revealed three themes pertaining to the family which appeared to elicit a wide variety of feelings and perceptions in participants. This involved an examination of specific aspects relating to the family, namely the different family forms that these delinquents encountered, the family relationships, patterns and response styles, as well as the family's level of emotional involvement, and how these family characteristics were perceived to have an impact on the development of these juvenile's criminal behaviour. It can be seen through conducting this research into the life histories of these boys, that it is possible to piece together various narratives surrounding their families and how it may have had a certain level of influence on these participants and how they became involved in crime. This is supported by Koch and Wood (2002) as well as Bischof et al (1995) who are virtually unanimous in identifying the family as a crucial influence in the development or elicitation of offending behaviour. Although the family was identified as a risk factor in the formation of this antisocial behaviour, areas of contestation are cited throughout these themes which stated that not only are there other factors such as peer groups and their influences that need to be taken into consideration as risk factors, but also various positive and protective factors of the family that could act to counteract one's involvement in crime.

When specifically looking at how the participant's perceived their families to have influenced their development of crime their results seemed to be incongruent. Whilst some individuals were able to identify specific aspects of their family lives as having a negative impact on their development and consequently resulting in their involvement in crime, others seemed to refute the impact their family had on them. However upon exploration these individuals began to reveal problematic aspects of their families which created a large amount of pain and frustration and therefore attributed to their participation in criminal activities. As a result, a large amount of predominant themes emerged across this range of juvenile delinquents and thus indicating the certain degree of contribution that the family has in the extraction of criminal behaviour. Despite these negative family aspects, offenders went on to reveal alternative positive factors of the family which did not impact

on their criminal demeanour and hence illustrating that the family cannot be considered the sole influencing factor when trying to understand what contributes to the formation of delinquent behaviour. Therefore, it is also important to acknowledge other factors such as peer pressure which were also attributed as contributing factors toward their acting out behaviour and once again emphasising that the family cannot be considered in isolation when attempting to identify what causes these juveniles to engage in criminal acts.

When explicitly examining the various aspects of the family, this study provided evidence that the different family forms that the delinquent is exposed to may lead to an increase in ones vulnerability to violence. Majority of these participants identified coming from single-headed households which often resulted in poverty and deprivation as factors that influenced their antisocial involvement as crime was often utilised as a method of subsistence to counteract their socioeconomic disadvantage. As a result, difficulties were specifically seen to arise in single-headed families who due to limited income and structural resources were unable to offer stability or the adequate resources that these individuals required when growing up and thus perceived by these participants as a possible influencing factor in their criminal formation. Thus, as highlighted by Simons et al (2005) as well as Mercy et al (2002), it results in situations where there is a more restricted scope for support and probable fewer economic resources which may be reasons why parenting often suffers as family stress increases and parenting practices are disrupted, and that these disruptions in the family form place youth at risk for becoming involved in crime and violence.

However these findings can also be said to be directly related to poverty where Mooney (1998) highlights that there is a definite relationship between poverty and crime. Koch and Wood (2002) in addition to Van der Merwe and Dawes (2000) go onto emphasise this point as poverty and a lack of structural resources have been found to co-occur with high levels of crime and violence. Many of the participants not only mentioned that money was a motivational factor for their own criminal involvement, but also specified that this money was often needed to satisfy the most basic needs. Thus there seems to be a fine line between what can be seen as a result of economic disadvantage or due to the actual

structure of the family and these aspects cannot be taken into consideration individually when trying to establish what leads to the development of offending behaviour.

Furthermore, the different family forms that these offenders are exposed to cannot be taken into consideration as a single contributing factor in the development of crime as some participants were not subjected to families of this nature but instead resided in nuclear families and also lived in socioeconomically stable circumstances. Others even idealised their family setting and described it as a positive environment which had no influence whatsoever on their delinquent acts. Thus the family structure, economic disadvantage or the presence of single-headed households cannot be considered in isolation when attempting to establish what factors of the family contribute to criminal behaviour (Simons et al, 2005; Mercy et al, 2002).

Moreover, these families and their relationships, patterns and response styles were found to be potentially influential in these young offenders decision to commit crime. Participants were exposed to parents getting divorced or separated at an early age or experienced a disruption in the family due to the loss of a family member via bereavement and perceived such events as possible contributing factors in their criminal involvement. This is verified by Pistorius (2005) as well as Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) as they point out how a vast amount of delinquents are raised in a negative disrupted environment which can be exemplified by negligence, inadequate discipline and a lack of positive role models due to involvement in violent and hostile activities that are present within the family setting. However, once again, it is important to highlight that no one factor can be seen as a cause in the development of offending behaviour, but that it is a complex interplay of different family characteristics that seemed to impact on the formation of antisocial tendencies in these juvenile delinquents. This is verified by Koch and Wood (2002) as they highlight how parental transitions due to bereavement or cessation of contact via divorce or separation, result in disconnected homes and poverty – two inter-linked aspects and thus support this study's findings as they appear not only to be common factors but also real influences that the participants identified in explaining how they ventured into criminal activity.

Even though not all participants inherently came from these detached family environments, this theme went onto reveal that there were other family problems in the backgrounds of this sample that were distinct from purely socioeconomic factors that needed to be taken into account. This is evidenced by both Loucks and Zamble (2000) as well as Kenny et al (1999) whose findings reveal that juvenile delinquents are often exposed to family risk factors including exposure to marital discord and domestic violence, parental or sibling alcoholism or drug abuse which they identified as precursors to many psychological difficulties, including their involvement in antisocial behaviour. Interestingly, one would expect children exposed to such harsh family environments to also constitute victims of abuse, however none of the individuals in this study were exposed to any form of exploitation within their family environments and thus was not considered a contributing factor on their criminal behaviour.

Although these offenders perceived the witness to violence within their family environment as a precursor to the onset of their delinquent demeanour, they also identified other factors that contest the influence of the family. This was evidenced as participants explained that witness to violence within their surrounding neighbourhoods and communities also impacted on their involvement in crime. Furthermore, other factors such as peer pressure and violence within group settings were also identified as being influential in the formation of their juvenile delinquency. Interestingly, theorists such as Sharpe and Litzelfelner (2004) highlight that as a result of the frustration and violence present in the disorganised family it makes one more vulnerable and susceptible to affiliation with deviant peers. Thus, these participant's may feel that their criminal involvement is from the overwhelming pressure placed upon them by peers, but being affiliated with such deviant peers may be an escape from the family in order to establish a sense of belonging elsewhere. However, despite this, other risk factors need to be taken into consideration when attempting to establish what influences the development of criminal behaviour. This is evidenced by Frick (2004) who states that it is very unlikely that the focus on any single risk factor will adequately account for the development of offending behaviour. As a result, in order to understand delinquent behaviour and what may influence its development, Frick (2004) indicate how multiple factors need to be integrated in trying to explain this

behaviour as this will consequently have important implications for serving children with this problematic behaviour.

Moreover, due to problematic and disrupted family forms, majority of these participants experienced poor monitoring and inadequate supervision which was accompanied by either strict rigid control devoid of warmth and support or inconsistent and ineffective discipline – all which were attributed to their involvement in crime and delinquency. Thus, it can be established that the participants from this study were exposed to a variety of different disciplinary methods which may have proved to be detrimental to their healthy development. This is supported by McCord (1999) who places emphasis on the impact and effect that caregivers have on their children through learning and modelling. McCord (1999) claims that categories of descriptions form potentiating reasons for an individual to behave in specified ways as learned from their immediate social environment and therefore caregivers inform the individual about the world and how to act within it. In teaching children how to act, McCord (1999) believes that parents display a variety of cues that indicate the values that they themselves place on various grounds for action. In doing this, cues and contingencies of a disorganised nature seemed to have been learned from their caregivers, which may have informed the development of these participants' criminal behaviour. Although a vast amount of these participants identified problematic disciplinary methods being implemented, some participants indicated adequate regulation and control being implemented in their family environment and thus contradicted this as an influencing factor in the formation of their criminal demeanour. This again places emphasis that the single factor of response styles carried out in the family cannot be considered in isolation when attempting to understand what influences the development of criminal behaviour.

In addition, this study also verifies that the level of emotional involvement within the delinquent's family is characterised by a lack of cohesion and connectedness which is experienced by these individuals to further impact upon their involvement in crime as negative emotions are unable to be expressed due to the emotional unavailability of caregivers. Often these individuals revealed how they received love in the form of materialistic entities. Furthermore, even though participants in this study had a good and stable relationship with one caregiver, the impact of having an absent caregiver was

highlighted as a predominant theme as it resulted in the common perceptions of feeling rejected, abandoned and neglected. This is supported by Dissel (1999a) who states that the loss of connectedness to parents or other role models can lay the foundation for the development of negative relationships with peer groups, through which exposure to criminal activity may be a possibility. Poor communication was also highlighted as an important sub-theme. Thus, as highlighted by Mkhondo (2005), Katsiyannis et al (2004), Mercy et al (2002), McCord (1999), Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1998), Regoli and Hewitt (1994) as well as Bischof et al (1992) the dismissal by ones caregivers as well as a lack of communication or inability to acknowledge emotions may be seen as predictors that may influence an individual engaging in offending behaviour.

Regoli and Hewitt (1994) go on to point out that it is also as a result of other factors which contribute to these findings – those that include parental transitions and absent parents which results in minimal supervision or involvement in their activities. This study highlights further factors such as extreme working conditions and overcrowded houses that disrupt the level of family cohesion. Thus it is becoming apparent that no single aspect of the family can be viewed in isolation as the different forms, relationships, patterns, response styles as well as the level of emotional involvement are all factors that are inter-linked and need to be viewed holistically when taking family factors that are perceived to influence the development of criminal behaviour into account. This need to look at all aspects of the family is further evidenced as some participants experienced their caregivers as emotionally available, supportive and understanding and therefore indicating that this family characteristic alone cannot be identified as an influencing factor in the formation of antisocial behaviour.

Thus, in summary the family environment can be considered as a significant context for juvenile offenders, although not the only context (Loucks & Zamble, 2000). Moreover, from the above findings it is important to highlight that no one family factor can be seen as a cause in the development of offending behaviour, but that it is a complex interplay of different family characteristics that may impact on the formation of antisocial tendencies in these youth. This is further illustrated by Mkhondo (2005) who indicates that single-headed families were believed to be unable to offer the stability, family cohesion, parental

supervision that offenders defined as being extremely important whilst growing up. Mkhondo (2005) goes on to indicate how these youth often display caregivers that are overwhelmed, offer little nurturance or discipline, and often rely on coercive and punitive techniques to foster submission in them as children. Thus, apart from poverty and physical hunger, Mkhondo (2005) highlights how the youths also express emotional hunger – a deep longing for love, nurturance, protection, innocence, warmth, joy and harmony. *“They longed for warm houses, mothers preparing food and for families without violence and conflict. For a lot of them these deprivations bred anger and resentment towards those who failed to provide, as well as towards those who had what they did not have”* (Mkhondo, 2005, p. 21). This indicates how important the child deems the nature of the relationship to their parent or caregiver and how the family or lack thereof, can influence one’s behaviour significantly.

Additionally, and what was revealed throughout, are the areas of contestation that need to be taken into account over and above the complex yet singular risk factor of the family. Some participants revealed how they felt that they were raised in a supportive and good family environment and thus felt that this was not an influencing factor in the formation of their delinquent behaviour. Others went on to illustrate that peer pressure as well as violence within their social communities were factors that contributed to their participation in antisocial acts. This is evidenced by Mercy et al (2002) who describe how friends and peers often act as contributing factors in the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour. Mkhondo (2005) further describes how violence is a multi-determined and complex phenomenon that challenges us to take into consideration individual motives, the crime context, as well as social, economic, cultural and individual backgrounds in order to understand it as the family cannot be considered in isolation when looking at the complex development of juvenile delinquent behaviour.

This study was an explorative piece of literature that identified various trends and themes which considered the perceptions that juvenile delinquents have with regards to their family and its influence on their involvement in criminal behaviour. Although not the only factor, it appears that from the above results and discussion one can infer that the

individual's experience – within the family and with other caregivers – can be viewed as a potential significant influence in the future course of their criminal development.

## **5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Various limitations were identified both at the outset and during the course of conducting this research.

### **5.2.1 Theoretical Limitations**

The major theoretical limitation that occurred within this study was the utilisation of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Such a theory was thought to provide evidence that moral development is related to the family system as Mooney (1998) depicts how the family becomes a primary context for moral reasoning to evolve. However, upon stating it as an intricate theory that relates to the offender and their family context, throughout the study it became apparent that moral development is more an internal trait that is present at birth and is not solely influenced by one's social context. This is supported by Rutter and Giller (1984) who indicated that criminality and moral development are shaped by latent trait theories – thus being controlled by some master trait present at birth or soon after which remains stable and unchanging throughout a lifetime. Thus, although an important theory to look at when attempting to understand one's moral dilemma and its possible impact on crime, it did not relate directly to the predominant family systems approach that this study aimed to adopt.

### **5.2.2 Limitations of method**

The use of a qualitative method, although advantageous as it provides an in-depth understanding of different individuals who undergo different experiences of their families, it incorporate a few disadvantages; however every effort was made to address these in the study. Qualitative research can occasionally be criticised for being subjective and uncontrolled especially with regard to the subjectivity of the researcher. During the facilitation of the individual interviews the researcher had certain ideas as to what areas of interest in studying the family might be useful for inclusion in the research. Consequently some of the facilitating interventions on the part of the researcher influenced the content of material that emerged and the level of engagement with particular topics. However the

researcher attempted to focus on themes that were directed by literature rather than the researcher, with a few additional topics being introduced by participants. It is nevertheless recognised that despite attempts at an unbiased, explorative piece of research, the analysis may have been coloured by the assumptions of the researcher and therefore the analysis and organisation of the results cannot be regarded as objectively definitive and the discussion offers only one of many possible sets of interpretations.

A further limitation of the method was demonstrated as many of the themes being explored in the study were of a personal and sensitive nature and thus one significant limitation of this study was that the data was gathered from a one-off interview with the participant. By limiting the collection of data to one interview, Koch and Wood (2002) highlight how the chance of building up a life history of each participant was impossible and additionally forfeits the opportunity to secure feedback on all the aspects of inquiry as well as to enable the participant to build a trusting relationship with the researcher. Since the information required for the study was often of a sensitive nature, the participants may not have always been prepared to answer all the questions posed to them and moreover may have felt uncomfortable to disclose such information in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, who was a stranger to the participant. This was perhaps evidenced by the idealisation of the family that permeated the interviews, particularly towards the beginning. It is possible that additional themes may have emerged with subsequent interviews and rapport.

Although critical and at times examining the latent information communicated by these participants, many of the themes identified in the literature are ones that were specifically identified by the participant. However, the fact that the study comprised only one set of interviews, limited the analysis of latent material. Further interviews would have allowed for more in-depth investigation of latent information. Nevertheless, the interviews were felt to be sufficiently detailed to allow for analysis of tensions, contradictions and the interpretation of the themes that were implied.

Additionally, the choice and size of any research sample has critical implications for the contextualisation of the research results in larger society. With all of these participants coming from outpatient diversion programmes which agreed to cooperate with the study as

well as being located within the province of Gauteng, findings from this study should be viewed with caution because they may not be similar to individuals convicted of a crime and allocated to a diversion programme in other provinces. Furthermore, these findings fail to take into consideration individuals that have been incarcerated or placed within facilities as a result of family dysfunction. This is supported by Bischof et al (1995) who state that it is unclear how family environments differ, if they do, from those juvenile delinquents who have committed either violent or non-violent crimes. Thus, due to the above and the fact that participants in this study were voluntary and self-selected, these findings may not necessarily be representative of all delinquent populations.

The study was further complicated by the fact that the sample did not have uniform features in many respects, such as the nature of the crime committed and not being racially inclusive. Although this sampling strategy attempted to yield a relatively representative set of communities, with sufficient variability on economic status to allow detection of significant relations between community characteristics and outcome variables of the family, however this failed to be achieved. All of the participants, although racially different, they all seemed to reside in poor communities where high exposure to community disadvantage and crime may have been experienced. This raises the question of whether our findings generalise to other groups of higher socioeconomic advantage and future studies need to establish the generalisability of these findings.

There are also several problems inherent in the use of a semi-structured interview. Open-ended questions seemed to prompt the participants into providing ambiguous or vague answers that were not directly related to their delinquent behaviour. This resulted in the researcher having to write up the results and findings, where the narrative referred to their involvement in crime, as opposed to the actual quotations reflecting this. This may have been due to participants not having understood the questions in the same way and thus the questions could have been more explorative and directly focused on their perceived family characteristics and its contribution to juvenile delinquency instead of being undefined and ambiguous.

### **5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In order to overcome the limitations stated above and in turn to garner a set of views and opinions representative of a wider class of male juvenile offenders, future research should aim to include participants from several socio-economic strata which could include more cultural variation than did this sample. This is supported by Simons et al (2005) as well as Leve and Chamberlain (2004) who believe that future research should take other factors into consideration and thus including measures such as socioeconomic status, community/neighbourhood factors, school-based socialisation practices as well as child temperament and intellectual functioning when focusing on the contributing factors in the development of juvenile delinquent behaviour. The above risk factors, according to Leve and Chamberlain (2004) have been shown to contribute to later delinquency and thus including such factors would improve these prediction models.

As mentioned above, the study is further limited by the reliability of the sample size. By looking at such a small sample, representing such a variety of personal and offence backgrounds, it is not possible to compare and draw conclusions about the experiences of all juvenile delinquents who have come into contact with the criminal justice system. For more meaningful results, it is suggested that future research narrows its focus by gaining more information from more individuals – thus creating a larger sample size that represents offenders who fall into specific categories who, for example, share the same offence history or who have passed through similar sentencing processes. Due to detailed information about offences and offence history not being obtained in this study, future studies should attempt to differentiate family characteristics amongst various types of juvenile offenders. This is highlighted as significant by Koch and Wood (2002) as well as Bischof et al (1992) who state that significant differences may emerge between various types of delinquent offenders, classified according to offences and offence patterns.

Moreover, it is suggested that similar inquiries arrange more than one interview that are to be carried out over a period of time and are conducted in such a way to allow for a relationship of trust and confidence to be built up between the participant and the researcher.

Additionally, it may be preferable to gather information from several family members when assessing family variables, yet this is not always possible and was beyond the scope of this research. The reporting of separate family member's perceptions for normative data is suggested so that accurate comparisons can be made when access is limited to individual family members. This is recommended by Bischof et al (1992) as a more comprehensive understanding of the family context as it would prove valuable in treatment planning and intervention design.

#### **5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This study provides valuable insight into a variety of experiences borne by youthful offenders involved in criminal activity within South Africa. It is a vital journey if one is to reach beyond the public disquietude surrounding these delinquent youngsters and begin to understand the human contours of their moral exile and pariah status. The study examines from their perspective how they perceive their families to have drawn them into this world of deviance. Whilst the narratives and recollections of these children may not present us with solutions, they do frame the issues in a more meaningful way than simple cold and bare statistics, lending insight into how one may have to approach solutions in the fight against crime. Whilst this study is only investigative in nature, it does point to several family factors that seem to drive children towards committing crime. This study provided juvenile delinquents' perceptions and perspectives of the reasons for their engagement in criminal violence related specifically to the family. The various themes that emerged can be viewed as indicators of risk factors that created a vulnerability to aggressive behaviour, rather than causal factors. None of these factors on their own can provide an explanation for criminal activities among youth, rather it is the interaction of many factors, including environmental factors and individual characteristics, which are critical but have not been taken into consideration in this study.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Subject Information Sheet - Participant



School of Human and Community Development  
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559*

#### To Whom It May Concern

My name is Leandra Harrison, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is that of juvenile offenders, and how their experiences and perceptions of their family may have influenced the development of juvenile offending behaviour. We live in a society where crime is rife, and therefore we need to more aware of how the juvenile offenders' environment impacts on his or her current functioning. Part of the research aims to explore the juvenile offenders' perceptions of their experiences, in particular, focusing on whether the family is perceived to play a part in the development of juvenile offending behaviour. In addition to this, we are exploring the family's structure, functioning, emotional life and whether exposure to a family trauma may have influenced the development of juvenile offending behaviour. We would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself, at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will last for approximately 30 – 45 minutes. With your permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept as confidential as possible, as direct quotations will be utilised in the research however no information that could identify you would be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any other person, at any time, and will only be processed by myself and my supervisor. After the research is complete and the data has been transcribed and analysed, both the tapes and the transcripts will be destroyed. Whilst the research is in progress, both the tapes and transcripts will be stored in a secure place by the researcher.

It is important to note that if you reveal any information about a violent crime that is in the process of being committed and that may harm yourself or others, I am bound from an ethical perspective to inform the relevant authorities.

It must be anticipated that this is a sensitive topic and certain questions may prove to be emotionally distressing. Thus you may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Nothing negative will occur if you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study. If at any point, you reveal information that is upsetting or troubling, debriefing will be provided by myself to ensure that no personal harm has

been done. In addition to this, if you experience any emotional distress, you will be referred to the relevant psychologist or counsellor working within the organisation. The results of the study will be in the form of a printed copy of the dissertation which will be made available to the University of the Witwatersrand's Psychology Department. The results also may be published in a possible journal article. A brief report that will demonstrate the basic findings of the study will be given to the organisation in order to protect your confidentiality, and if you wish to do so, you can gain access to it through the relevant members of the organisation.

If you have any questions or queries with regard to the information presented above, please do not hesitate to ask me.

If you choose to participate in the study please fill in your details on the form below and place it in the sealed box provided. I will collect the box after a two week interval, and will contact the organisation in order to discuss your participation and to establish when it is a convenient time to contact you.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to establishing whether the family does act as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile offending behaviour which will therefore have value in contributing to the prevention and interventions that are offered amongst you as youths.

Kind Regards

**Leandra Harrison.**

Masters Psychology Student

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Mobile: 084 250 6901

[lharrison@mweb.co.za](mailto:lharrison@mweb.co.za)

**Dr. Garth Stevens**

Supervisor

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[Garth.Stevens@wits.ac.za](mailto:Garth.Stevens@wits.ac.za)

## Appendix B: Subject Information Sheet – Legal guardian



School of Human and Community Development  
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559*

Dear Legal Guardian

My name is Leandra Harrison, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is that of juvenile offenders, and how their experiences and perceptions of their family may have influenced the development of juvenile offending behaviour. We live in a society where crime is rife, and therefore we need to more aware of how the juvenile offenders' environment impacts on his or her current functioning. Part of the research aims to explore the juvenile offenders' perceptions of their experiences, in particular, focusing on whether the family is perceived to play a part in the development of juvenile offending behaviour. In addition to this, we are exploring the family's structure, functioning, emotional life and whether exposure to a family trauma may have influenced the development of juvenile offending behaviour. We would like to invite your child to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself, at a time that is convenient for your child. The interview will last for approximately 30 – 45 minutes. With your permission this interview with your child will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and your child will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. Your child's responses will be kept as confidential as possible, as direct quotations will be utilised in the research however no information that could identify your child will be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any other person at any time, and will only be processed by myself and my supervisor. After the research is complete and the data has been transcribed and analysed, both the tapes and the transcripts will be destroyed. Whilst the research is in progress, both the tapes and transcripts will be stored in a secure place by the researcher.

It is important to note that if your child reveals any information about a violent crime that is in the process of being committed and that may harm himself or others, I am bound from an ethical perspective to inform the relevant authorities.

It must be anticipated that this is a sensitive topic and certain questions may prove to be emotionally distressing. Thus your child may refuse to answer any questions he would prefer not to, and your child may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Nothing negative will occur if you choose not to allow your child to participate or withdraw from the study. If at any point, your child reveals information that is upsetting or troubling, debriefing will be provided by myself to ensure that no personal harm has been done. In addition to this, if your child experiences any emotional distress, he will be referred to the relevant psychologist or counsellor working

within the organisation. The results of the study will be in the form of a printed copy of the dissertation which will be made available to the University of the Witwatersrand's Psychology Department. The results also may be published in a possible journal article. A brief report that will demonstrate the basic findings of the study will be given to the organisation in order to protect your child's confidentiality, and if you wish to do so, you can gain access to it through the relevant members of the organisation.

If you choose to allow your child to participate in the study please fill in your details on the form below and place it in the sealed box provided. I will collect the box after a two week interval, and will contact the organisation in order to discuss your child's participation.

Your child's participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to establishing whether the family does act as an influencing factor in the development of juvenile offending behaviour which will therefore have value in contributing to the prevention and interventions that are offered amongst these youths.

Kind Regards

**Leandra Harrison.**

Masters Psychology Student  
Tel. (011) 704 1533  
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[lharrison@mweb.co.za](mailto:lharrison@mweb.co.za)

**Dr. Garth Stevens**

Supervisor  
Department of Psychology  
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Tel. (0)11 717-4535  
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[Garth.Stevens@wits.ac.za](mailto:Garth.Stevens@wits.ac.za)

## Appendix C: Consent Form (Interview - Participant)



School of Human and Community Development

*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa*

*Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559*

I have read and understood what this research involves and what is expected of me.

I understand that:

- Participation for this interview is entirely voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to or that I feel uncomfortable answering.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time and it will not be held against me in any way.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential with exceptions in the use of direct quotes.
- If I disclose any violent crimes that are in the process of being committed that will either harm myself or others, the researcher will report this to the relevant authorities.
- If I should experience any emotional distress, debriefing will be provided by the researcher or I will be referred to a relevant psychologist or counsellor.

I hereby consent to participate in this research project. I give Leandra Harrison permission for my results to be used in the write up of this study.

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Consent Form (Interview - Legal guardian)



School of Human and Community Development

*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa*

*Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559*

I have read and understood what this research involves and what is expected of my child.

I understand that:

- Participation of my child in this interview is entirely voluntary.
- That my child may refuse to answer any questions that he would prefer not to or that he may feel uncomfortable answering.
- I may withdraw my child from the study at any time and it will not be held against me or my child in any way.
- No information that may identify my child will be included in the research report, and his responses will remain confidential with exceptions in the use of direct quotes.
- If my child discloses any violent crimes that he is in the process of committing that will either harm himself or others, the researcher will report this to the relevant authorities.
- If my child should experience any emotional distress, debriefing will be provided by the researcher or my child will be referred to a relevant psychologist or counsellor.

I hereby consent for my child to participate in this research project. I give Leandra Harrison permission for my child's results to be used in the write up of this study.

Child's name : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Legal guardian's signature : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Consent Form (Recording - Participant)



School of Human and Community Development  
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559*

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to my interview with Leandra Harrison for her study on the perceptions of family functioning and its impact on juvenile offending being tape-recorded.

I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher and her supervisor.
- These tapes and transcripts will be kept in a safe place that is locked at all times and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report that will identify me as a participant of this study.

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Consent Form (Recording - Legal guardian)



School of Human and Community Development  
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559*

I \_\_\_\_\_ the legal guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ consent to my child's interview with Leandra Harrison for her study on the perceptions of family functioning and its impact on juvenile offending being tape-recorded.

I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher and her supervisor.
- These tapes and transcripts will be kept in a safe place that is locked at all times and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report that will identify my child as a participant of the study.

Child's name : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Legal guardian's signature : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: Consent Form (Place in which research is to take place)



School of Human and Community Development  
*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559*

To Whom It May Concern

### **Consent to interview juvenile offenders in the organisation of Khulisa / SPARK**

I am currently completing my Masters Degree in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Recent studies have noted that the family has a significant impact on the development of juvenile offending behaviour. The need for a clearer understanding of the influencing factors that a family has on the juvenile offender has led me to research how the juvenile offender perceives their experiences of the family and what impact it has had on them as an individual. I would therefore appreciate your consent to administer a research interview to the juvenile offenders in the diversion programme of your organisation, under the guidance of my supervisor. In order to facilitate your decision, I attach a copy of:

The protocol, including a copy of the informed consent.

The approval from the University Committee for Research on Human Subjects and Higher Degrees Committee.

The results of this study will be publicised for my dissertation requirements, and a copy will be handed to this organisation for individuals to gain access to it if they wish to do so. The results may also be published in a journal article.

Any potential incriminating information regarding your organisation will not be included in the report.

All of the participant's responses will be kept as confidential as possible, as direct quotations will be utilised in the research however no information that could identify them will be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any other person at any time, and will only be processed by myself and my supervisor. After the research is complete and the data has been transcribed and analysed, both the tapes and the transcripts will be destroyed. Whilst the research is in progress, both the tapes and transcripts will be stored in a secure place by the researcher.

It is important to note that if the participant reveals any information about a violent crime that is in the process of being committed and that may harm themselves or others, I am bound from an ethical perspective to inform the relevant authorities.

Should you require any further information to make a decision, my telephone number is 084 250 6901.

Kind Regards

**Leandra Harrison**  
Masters Psychology Student  
Tel. (011) 704 1533  
Mobile: 084 250 6901  
[lharrison@mweb.co.za](mailto:lharrison@mweb.co.za)

**Dr. Garth Stevens**  
Supervisor  
Tel. (0)11 717-4535  
Mobile: 082 338 3864  
[Garth.Stevens@wits.ac.za](mailto:Garth.Stevens@wits.ac.za)

## Appendix H: Interview Schedule

### Family Structure

- 1) Describe the family that you grew up in.  
*(I.e. how many people are in your family; who have you lived with most; problems you feel you have had growing up).*
  
- 2) How did your primary caregivers contribute to your upbringing? And how did they meet your basic needs and necessities?  
*How do you feel your parents have given to you whilst growing up? What do you think they missed out on or have not been able to give you? Were they able to provide for you easily and give to you what you needed as a child?*
  
- 3) How supportive and involved were your primary caregivers (*parents*) as you were growing up?

### Family Functioning

- 4) Describe the relationship between your primary caregivers or parents (mother and father).  
*(I.e. kind and loving; arguing; aggressive; divorced etc).*
  
- 5) Describe the types of activities your primary caregivers were involved in.  
*What things have they been involved in whilst you were growing up?*  
*What kinds of things / activities have your parents been involved in – have they ever been involved in things that you felt was wrong? Done things that you should not know about...*
  
- 6) How did your primary caregivers provide you with supervision, support and guidance?  
*How have your parents looked after you and helped you growing up? (i.e. with your problems, schoolwork etc).*
  
- 7) Describe whether you experienced your family as keeping secrets from you?  
*Describe whether you feel your family as keeping secrets from you?*

### **Family Emotional Expressions**

- 8) Describe how you interacted with the primary caregivers in your life.  
*How do you get along with your parents? (I.e. kind and loving; arguing; aggressive etc).*
- 9) What kind of love, support or approval did you receive from your primary caregivers?  
*Describe whether your parents show their love, support or approval. If so, how do they do this? If not, what do they show you instead?*
- 10) How did you feel whilst you were growing up? What types of emotions? (I.e. happy, angry, sad, understood etc).

### **Family Emotional Responsiveness**

- 11) How did your primary caregivers care for you?  
*(I.e. have they always been interested in how you feel? Paid attention to what is going on with you? Have you felt that you can always talk to them or approach them with your problems?)*
- 12) What kind of methods of discipline or orders did your primary caregivers use?  
*How did your parents discipline you?*
- 13) How often did this discipline or supervision take place? (I.e. regularly or once in a while).

### **Family Trauma**

- 14) Describe anything painful or traumatic that you or somebody else in the family may have experienced in the past. (I.e. death, abuse, divorce etc).
- 15) In what way do you think your family impacted on your development?  
*In what way do you think your family has affected you whilst growing up?*