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AN EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES OF FOSTER PARENTS RAISING AFRICAN FOSTER CARE CHILDREN WITH ABSENT FATHERS

SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK DEGREE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

AT

THE UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

BY

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AUGUST 2017

SUPERVISOR: MOTLALEPULE NATHANE-TAULELA

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report is my own original work and that I have correctly referenced all the sources utilised. This research has not been submitted previously for any degree.

Vuyisile Portia Khaba 2017/08/07

Signature Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to articulate my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the following in no particular order:

To my Father in heaven, thank you Lord for seeing me through my study path.

To my supervisor, Ms Motlalepule Nathane-Taulela no amount of words can describe how grateful I am for all your support and always being available for consultations.

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To my participants, thank you for giving me your time.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research report to all the children who are growing up with absent living fathers as well as to all the people who are raising these children.

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of absent fathers is not uniquely a South African problem but it is a global issue affecting numerous countries such as Norway, the United States of America as well as other African countries such as Nigeria, Swaziland Botswana to mention a few. Levels of paternal absence in South Africa seem particularly high in comparison to estimates for many other African countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The absence of fathers in their children's lives leave children vulnerable after their biological mothers pass on and are subsequently placed in foster care as a measure of protecting and securing the child. The primary aim of this study was to explore the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers in the Mpumalanga Province in Gert Sibande region, Msukaligwa sub-district. This study used a qualitative approach with an exploratory design. The research instrument that was used was an interview schedule and the data collection method that was employed was face-to-face semi structured interview. Data were analysed through thematic content analysis. The participants in the study comprised of 20 foster care parents aged from 25 years old and above. The main findings of this study were that foster parents seemed to perceive fathers as economic providers and most of them expressed that their absence seemed to be felt especially when it comes to the lack of financial provision. In addition to financial hardships, emotional and cultural hardships were also identified. The study recommends that more studies of this nature need to be done in order to come up with intervention strategies that governments need to use in order to release some of the strains faced by foster parents who are raising African children in foster care. The conclusion of the study is that South African families require attention, considering that father absence has taken a toll. The ripple effect of father's failure to be present in their children's lives and support their children will increase the number of children depending on state interventions such as foster care placements.

Key words
Family, foster care parents, foster child, absent father

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF STUDY

An exponential increase in the numbers of absent fathers has been reported in South Africa, however this trend is not only particular to South Africa, it is also common in the global world and in developed countries, especially the United States of America, where it has been reported that African American families with single mothers are increasing (Choi & Jackson, 2011). For example a brief that was released by the Statistics South Africa (2012) demonstrated that 92.7% of all young children had both their biological parents alive. About 96.7% infants had both their biological parents alive while children aged between 1-2 years had both parents alive after which the percentage decreased further to 90.0% for those aged 3-4 years old. In total 97.7% of young children had their mother's alive and 91.6% had their father's alive. The proportions of children with one parent alive and those with both parents deceased increased with age among young children. At infancy 2.5% of children had only a mother alive compared to 0.4% of those with only the father alive. By age 3-4 years, 6.6% of children had only their mother alive compared to 1.6% of those having only a father alive. In general 0.7% of infants and children aged 1-2 years had both their parents unknown or absent with 1.1% among those aged 3-4 years having both parents' dead. In relation to living arrangements a total of 18.7% of young children aged below 5 years lived with neither parent. A total of 0.5 % children less than five years were placed in foster care. Children placed in foster care in 2012 comprised of 0.3% infants, 0.5% of those aged 1-2 years old and 0.7% of those aged 3-4 years old.

It is therefore vital to understand the widespread phenomenon of absent fathers not only in the South African context but as well as in other countries as growing numbers of children in the country as well as internationally are raised in homes with absent fathers. For instance the history of slavery in America is so relevant to the problem of absent fathers even to date (Timaeus, 2007). It is arguable that by law, the slavery institution denied the male slaves their rights as fathers and husbands therefore making them unable fulfil to their duties as husbands and fathers. The institution of slavery created a subculture where all societal norms, expectations and laws, forcibly served to weaken the bonds between children and their fathers. The conditions of slavery provided the opposite of what is required in order to

preserve the fragile bond between fathers and their children (Timaeus, 2007). Studies further reveal that about four of every ten children in the United States live in homes with absent fathers and the mother is seen to raise the children alone or with the help of family (Morehouse Research Institute, 2003).

Norway is another country where the phenomenon of absent fathers was seen to be problem. In a Norwegian study by Skevik, 2004 some of the factors which cause constraints when it comes to the fathers presence in their children's lives are said to be poverty, beginning of a new relationship and non-cohabiting. It is arguable that the splitting of many couples contributes to the lack of father's involvement in the children's lives however it is also notable that although some fathers try to keep in contact with their children even after they have spilt up with their mothers and are not cohabiting, the lack of financial resources makes it difficult to keep contact with their children as money is a necessary resource when keeping in contact. On the contrary, whilst it is traditionally accepted that mothers are associated with the nurturing roles, in modern society this traditional view seems to be changing as women become educated and are working, one finds that the fathers are the ones who take on the role of nurturing their young ones. Therefore one finds that the fathers are more involved and present in their children's lives whilst their mothers work odd shifts or are away on work related expeditions. On the other hand when mothers of children with absent fathers pass on, their children are normally left behind with their maternal families such s their grandparents, uncles and aunts who then have to take on the responsibility of taking care of the children. Some children end up in foster care as they are vulnerable when their mothers pass on and their fathers are absent (Thomas. 2006).

Statistics reported in the year 2009 by the South African Institute of Race Relations indicated that 48 per cent of children in South Africa have living but absent fathers (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Richter and Morrell (2008) concur that about 50 percent South African men who are estimated to be fathers, do not have regular contact with their children. The absence of a father has detrimental consequences for families, and society as a whole as it shreds the moral fabric and has an adverse effect on socialisation. Richter and Morrell (2006) note that caring fatherhood is not only beneficial to families and societies but that it is also beneficial to fathers themselves. The authors note that fathers may be happier and be able to facilitate their own growth through their positive involvement and engagement in their children's growth.

The phenomenon of absent fathers poses an economic, societal, family and personal problem all rolled into one. While most governments try by all means to curtail and arrest the problem, the issue of absent fathers remains widespread and rife, causing devastation, and suffering for the majority of families. According to Lamb (1997), the role of a father has been traditionally defined as that of a provider and an authority figure in the family. A study conducted in the United States of America concluded that the absence of fathers in the lives of their children is associated with adverse negative consequences such as poor educational attainment, poor health, poor socialisation, anti-social behaviour, and risks of unemployment (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). According to Rampele (2002) children in absent father households consider themselves fatherless and this generates a sense of loss and confusion in them.

There are numerous determinants to the increasing numbers of absent fathers in South Africa such as a father's individual choice to be absent from his child's life, migrant labour and cultural factors. However, poverty and high rates of unemployment may undermine the fathers' ability to financially provide for their children, hence fathers' failure to take responsibility for their children. According to Ramphele (2002), 'Desertion by fathers is often prompted by their inability to bear the burden of being primary providers. The burden of failure becomes intolerable for those who lack the capacity to generate enough income as uneducated and unskilled labourers. Desertion is not always physical, it can also be emotional. Many men 'die' as parents and husbands by indulging [in] alcohol [or] drugs, or becoming unresponsive to their families'.

Equally significant, legislative provisions of migrant labour put in place during the apartheid era separated fathers from their children and limited the time that fathers spent with their children (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). Cultural factors also play a significant role in the presence or absence of fathers in the lives of their children. In the majority of African cultures the biological fathers of children are expected to pay lobola or damages to be accorded, parental, access and visitation rights (Hunter, 2006). This state of affairs has an adverse effect on those that do not have the financial means to culturally acknowledge paternity. In South Africa, not every man can afford the payment of lobola due to the high unemployment rate (Wilson, 2006). It is arguable that regardless of the measure used, too many South Africans are unemployed. The Journal of Economics in Transition (2008) asserts that 26% of the labour force is unemployed and that this has not always been this way. It is said that unemployment appeared to be fairly low through the 1970s and 1980s, and that at the time of

democratic transition in 1994, unemployment was substantially lower than it is today. At least three reasons are given for why the unemployment rate in South Africa has remained at such high levels. These are namely that job search appears to be less effective for African job seekers as compare to whites, which is likely due to the spatial separation between the business centres and the outlying areas where African reside. The lack of affordable public transportation undoubtedly contributes to this problem. After decades of institutional racial decimation, remnants surely persist, and when combined with high search costs, even a smaller degree of discrimination could cause the high unemployment rates we observe. Secondly, it is noted that unlike many African countries, the informal sector has grown very little participation and unemployment rates have risen. Crime rates and high start-up costs for small businesses probably impede its growth. The study further reveals that the Old Age pension scheme contributes to the unemployment problem as pension income is often used to support other members of the household, especially younger workers. The poor growth in total employment between 1970 -2005 is associated with the substantial structural change. The primary sector mainly agriculture and mining was shedding labour throughout the period while finance, wholesalers and retail sales and community, social and personal services increased employment. Thus, the sectorial composition of employment changed substantially in South Africa. Agriculture went from 33% of total employment to only 11% while wholesalers and retail sales went from 9 to 25% and employment in the financial sector also increased from 3 to 11%. This changed the composition of employment in terms of educational attainment, favouring more skilled worker. It also appears plausible that displaced workers from agriculture and mining were unable to relocate to regions where jobs might be available, which could be why then there so many discouraged workers in the rural areas. The prevalence of such practises results in weak or non- existent father-child relationships and the prevalence of absent living fathers. Dysfunctional relationships as well as conflict ridden relationships are also another major factor which contributes to absent fathers. Children may be used to settle personal scores when relationships break down, and mothers may choose not to allow the father access to his children, which will inevitably result in poor child-father relationships (Santrock, 2006).

Findings from McDonald's (2009) study points out that not all fathers become absent from their children's lives but that in South Africa there seems to be a trend of fathers who take full responsibility of and custody of their children and have decided to be single fathers. Whilst the findings of McDonald (2009) are important it is also vital that a qualitative exploratory

study be conducted with women caregivers in South Africa who are raising children with absent living fathers in order to understand this phenomenon which has become a trend in South Africa and international countries as well as the implications that absent fathers has on their children's lives after the deaths of their biological mothers as well as the burden that the state has to carry in looking out for these vulnerable children who are placed in foster care.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Although the phenomenon of absent fathers is a global concern (Choi & Jackson, 2011), it is more pronounced in African families in South Africa due to the legacy of apartheid (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). This is because between the period of the 1960s and 1980s the apartheid government forcibly moved about 3.5 million black South Africans in certain areas (Henrard, 1996). This was mainly for the implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 which mandated for the removals of Blacks, Indians and Coloureds for the purposes of residential segregation throughout the country. Furthermore the Act provided a way of facilitating control over the black urban population as it aimed at disuniting Africans, Coloureds and Indians by dividing them in segregated urban townships.

The aim of the forced relocations was to divide and control racially separate communities at a time of growing organised resistance to apartheid in urban areas. The stresses brought about the political system paused as a challenge for many children and families. The migrant labour system further disrupted all aspect of family life. Where one would find that women (rural wives) left at home were to lead celibate lives and focus on mothering their children. Their families moved from one place to another and children were sent to live with relatives. Because of the long periods of separation between the husband and the wife, many men ended up with two families, an urban woman to satisfy his sexual needs and a rural wife to look after the household in his absence. Given the low wages, some men were trapped into neglecting their rural families, therefore being absent fathers to their children. It is therefore no surprise that in a South African community, a mother heading a family without a father is perceived to be the norm because of the great number of absent fathers (Morrell & Richter, 2006).

Even though the social work profession is one of the key role players in the placement of children in foster care very little research has been done to look at absent fathers in relation to

foster care. Therefore, the study has improved the standard of quality of direct practice and the rendering of supervision services to children placed in foster care. Social workers on the ground level were empowered with ways of assisting children who are placed in foster care as a result of absent fathers. Also, very little is done by social workers who place children in foster care when it comes to understanding the significance of cultural practices of children who are in foster care whose fathers are absent. Therefore children are excluded from cultural practices which involve fathers and or the paternal family of the child. Children who are placed in foster care as a result of absent fathers are exposed to various cultural belief systems and practices of their foster parents which may or may not always be necessarily similar to those of their biological father's clan. Such children are exposed to identity confusion as they may not always fully identify with their foster families, as a result one finds children who as youths begin to ask many questions about their origins and also embark on journeys of father searching. In their study Davids and Romans (2013) point out that some children who are raised in single-parent families, typically being raised by foster care mothers have low economic income, educational and employment attainment as compared to children who are raised in two parent families who reportedly have higher levels of achievement.

Children in foster care are subjected to statutory processes and are sometimes placed with unrelated foster parents who may or may not provide adequate care and may or may not exercise parental techniques that are familiar to the child. This study therefore, made an attempt to understand the effects of absentee fatherhood on the lives foster parents raising children with absent fathers.

There seems to be a high proportion of children in the Msukaligwa sub district who were placed in foster care as a result of their mothers' deaths and biological fathers are absent and their whereabouts are unknown to the families of the children (South African Social Security Agency, 2013). Statistics from the South African Social Security Agency (2016) database confirmed that in the year 2016 there were a total of 10133 children placed in foster care in the Gert Sibande region only. This total comprises of about 50 percent of children who have been placed in foster care as a result of orphanhood in other words having both of their biological parents deceased, about 35 percent of the children in the database were placed in foster care as a result of their mothers being deceased and their fathers reported to be unknown or have abandoned them. These children were found to be in need of care by their social workers and respective Children's Court Magistrates in terms Children's Act 38 of

2005 as amended in section 150 (1)(a) of the said Act. The remaining children who were placed in foster care were placed there not because they are orphans or because of neglect and absence by their biological fathers but were placed there after they were found to be in need of care and protection.

From the statistics it is arguable that the phenomenon of father absence has implications for social work practice. The absence of the father in a child's life makes the child vulnerable, even more so if the child's mother is deceased. Such children then become dependent on the state for provision and support. Most of these children end up becoming children in need of care, who are subsequently placed in foster care placements by social workers. The latest foster care placements of the South African Social Security Agency (2013) demonstrate that the Msukaligwa sub- district is amongst the high numbers of foster care placements in the Gert Sibande district which consists of nine sub- districts in total, with a total of 884 children placed in foster care during the year 2012. Approximately more than two thirds of the children are placed in foster care as a result of mother's deaths and biological fathers whereabouts reported to be unknown therefore a study of this nature is significant uncovering the phenomenon of absent fathers in relation to children who are placed in foster care and how this impacts on the lives of foster care parents in general.

In most African cultures the birth of a child is traditionally and ceremonially celebrated. There are many rituals which are performed from the birth of a child and throughout their entire life (Mkhize, as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006). For instance, in other communities such as Transkei where the community holds strong values and believes about African traditions, during the ritual called "imbeleko" it is the father who provides a name and introduces the child to ancestors. It is believed then that failure to perform the "imbeleko" ritual for the child, the child will be exposed to misfortune which continues throughout his or her entire life (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). These rituals are performed according to the paternal clan. Therefore the absence of a father means that those children may be deprived of such rituals and may be subjected to misfortune which continues for the rest of their lives as according to some African cultural beliefs.

It is important that social science research should contribute towards a broader understanding of the widespread problematic phenomenon of absent fathers in South Africa. Scholars like Morrel, Mkhize and Nduna have undertaken studies to understand the phenomenon of absent

fathers. Their studies have expanded on understanding the broader societal effects of absent fatherhood and none of their studies undertook to study these effects on foster parents living with children placed in foster care as a result of father absence.

Therefore, the study is important to the profession of Social Work in that it enhances social workers knowledge in locating the cultural practices in the African traditional thinking. It will also assist to identify the cultural implications of children who are brought up with absent living fathers and those whose paternal families are not present in their lives to perform such ceremonies for them. It is argued that even when other family male figures get involved, the process as argued by Ramphele and Richter (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006, p.78) becomes "denuded of its social meaning, 'the ritual becomes a long, lonely process' for those disadvantaged young men, without fathers or responsible male relatives."

1.3 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.4.1 Foster care

Foster care is described by the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended as a system that is created to ensure that children are raised in a functional family system that nurtures the holistic growth of a child that is seen to be in of care and protection. "The foster care services are a social welfare policy programme aimed at creating opportunities for children to live in safe and protective environments and to ensure that these children are surrounded by nurturing relationships" (National Guidelines for Statutory Services to Child Headed Households, 2010, p.37). They are a statutory intervention whereby a child is removed from their normal place of residence to alternative care, by means of a court order (Integrated Service Delivery Model, 2006).

1.4.2 Family

A family is defined by Shorter (1998, p.9), as "a minimal effective group of relatives by blood and or marriage and analogous groups." This definition succinctly captures the structure of African families which stretches beyond the Western nuclear family concept which defines a family as two individuals who are joined together by bonds of sharing or intimacy (Hepworth, Rooney and Larsen, 2006).

1.4.3 KEY WORDS

Absent fathers, foster care placement, foster parent, foster child

1.5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A detailed description of the research methodology, including the research approach, type of research, research design, methodology, and the measures that were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, as well as the ethical considerations of the study will be presented in Chapter 3. The following discussion is a brief overview of the research design and methodology utilised for the study. The study adopted a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is more concerned with the "what" questions, which was exactly what the study sought answers for (Fouché & De Vos, 2002). A qualitative approach did justice to the study in that it enabled the researcher to explore the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers.

This research was exploratory in nature. More specifically, it was an applied research study since it sought to apply and tailor knowledge to address the challenges faced in practice (Neuman, 2003).A qualitative research design, more specifically, the collective case study design was utilised in the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). A collective case study enabled the researcher to gain insight and an understanding into the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers. The researcher made use of a non-probability sampling technique namely purposive sampling method. This allowed the researcher to purposely gather typical and divergent data and to use her judgement in selecting the participants for the study (Strydom & Delport, 2011). Inclusion criteria for the research sampling were Msukaligwa African foster care parents who are raising children with absent living fathers. The researcher adopted a face-to-face interview as the method of data collection. The research tool was pre-tested on one of the Msukaligwa foster care parents who are also raising a child in foster care with an absent living father. The views and challenges of African foster care parents were analysed through thematic content analysis.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Socially desirable answers may have been given by the research participants in a bid to avoid scrutiny of their parenting styles. To minimize this, the researcher established rapport with the participants and informed them to answer as openly and freely as possible.

- The questions in the interview schedule were developed in English and later translated to Zulu for ease of communication. Some of the concepts of the study could not be clearly explained concisely into isiZulu. As such, the participants might have not clearly understood the concepts, which in turn, could have influenced the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study. However, findings still reflect the participants' personal views.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The research report comprises of five chapters. The first chapter is a general introductory chapter which provides a general orientation of the study. The chapter outlines the problem statement and indicates the rationale for the study as well as a brief description of the research design and methodology of the study and provides a brief overview of the research methodology.

Chapter two consists of the literature review. The researcher imbeds the study in relation to other studies done on absent fathers. Literature will be reviewed on foster children and their foster parents will be undertaken in a bid to understand and conceptualise the phenomenon of absent fathers as well as the effects thereof on the growing child.

In chapter three, the researcher outlines the research methodology used for the study. This includes a detailed explanation on the research approach, type of research, research design, study population, sampling, data collection, data analysis, pilot study and ethical issues.

Chapter four presents and discusses the research findings. In this chapter, the biographic details of participants will first be presented in a narrative format, and where applicable, followed by a graphical illustration of the findings. The findings from semi-structured interviews will be discussed by means of themes and sub-themes, which will also be presented in a hierarchical tree diagram. The discussion and analysis of data will be supplemented by the voices of the participants by means of direct quotes. The verification of findings with literature will be done in a separate discussion section following the presentation of the findings.

Chapter five is the final chapter of the report and it outlines the key research findings from which the conclusions and recommendations of the study are made. Furthermore, the researcher indicates how the goal and objectives of the study have been achieved. .

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Father absence is not a uniquely African problem, in countries like America for instance the problem of fathers not being present in the lives of their children and being absent from their upbringing has become a trend. This practice seems to have been tolerated and father absence is reported to keep increasing each year (Morehouse Institute & Institute for American Value, 1999). Magqaza (2001) notes that a continuous intergenerational norm of father absence keeps reoccurring in society when society accepts fathers absence as a norm, expected and anticipated to the extent that fathers are viewed as not needed in the upbringing of children. In South Africa, a study by Posel and Devey (as cited in Richter and Morrell, 2006, p. 41) shows that "over 40% of men aged 15 to 54 years were counted as fathers in 2002, yet 57% of children were reported to be fatherless". Hence while there are statistics of men being counted as fathers, it would be unrealistic to assume that conception should inevitable result to the acceptance of parental roles by fathers.

There are various contributory factors to the increasing numbers of absent fathers in South Africa such as a father's individual choice to be absent from his child's life, unemployment, migrant labour, cultural factors such as *Lobola* and *inhlawulo* (payments to appease the bride's family for having impregnated their daughter out of wedlock) to mention a few (Hunter & Wilson, 2006). Dysfunctional relationships as well as conflict ridden relationships are also another major factor which contributes to absent fathers. Structural, infrastructural and policy influences have also been seen to be having a contribution to the disintegration and defragmentation of families, which eventually lead to the phenomenon of absence of fathers (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). The absence of a father has detrimental consequences for families, and society as a whole (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Responsible fatherhood is of benefit to the development of children and to the building families and society as a whole (Lamb, 1997). In Southern South Africa evidence shows that, there is a wide spread and spreading disturbing phenomenon of absent fathers. Statistics South Africa (2012) demonstrate that the majority of children from the white (86.5%), Indian (77.5%), Coloured (53.5%) and black African (31.0%) population groups lived with biological parents. About 45.5% of black African children lived with only their biological mother, while 21% lived

with neither parent. The South African Institute of Race Relations 2009 statistics reported that 48 per cent of children in South Africa have living but absent fathers (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Research shows that caregivers with custody of their children are usually mothers or maternal grandmothers (Richter & Morrell, 2006). The following subtopics will be discussed in the in detail: foster care in South Africa-Legislative framework, foster care placements and absent fathers, labour migration as some of the contributing factors to absent fatherhood amongst other factors, Apartheid and forced removals-breakdown of family life, foster care as a developmental approach, effects of absent fathers, studies conducted on absent fathers , traditional views on the importance of fatherhood, traditional roles of fatherhood in South Africa, international strategies to involve fathers, father absence, foster care grant as one of the social assistance programmes to alleviate poverty, children's need for a father, female-headed households and extended family members as well as the theoretical framework.

2.2 FOSTER CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA-LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Foster care is one of the integral components of the South African alternative care system. Breen (2015) notes that since the year 2002, the number of orphans in South Africa has risen drastically and the demand on foster care placement has also increased with the increased deaths of children's biological parents. This undoubtedly has placed a strain on the delivery of services. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa sets out minimum standards pertaining to socio-economic rights - including social security, social assistance and social services in that the state resources are…….. Section 28(1) of the Constitution states that *"every child has the right… (b) to family care or parental care or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment* [and] *(c) to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services."* Importantly, section 28(2) of the Constitution states that, *"the best interests of the child are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child".*

The right to appropriate alternative care is also one of the provisions, with consideration of the best interest of the child principle is the starting point and real issue when one reviews and analyses the placement of children in foster care. Foster care, as set out in Chapter 12 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, is a form of alternative placement a children's court can order. A child may be placed in foster care when the child has been deemed by the children's courts to be a child in need of care and protection as defined in section 150 of the Act or if a child is

transferred to this type of placement in terms of section 171 of the Act. According to section 180, a child may be placed in foster care with *"(a) a person who is not a family member of the child, (b) with a family member who is not the parent or guardian of the child; or (c) in a registered cluster foster care scheme"*. Section 181 of the Act cites the purposes of foster care as being to *"(a) protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support; (b) promote the goals of permanency planning, first towards family reunification, or by connecting children to other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime; and (c) respect the individual and family by demonstrating a respect for cultural, ethnic and community diversity".* Section 7 of the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004 renders a foster parent eligible for a care grant for the child concerned in the child is placed in his or her custody (Children's Act 38 of 2005, as amended).

According to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended, foster care placement is defined as a mechanism through which the government provides for children who are considered to be the responsibility of the state and not chiefly intended as a poverty alleviation mechanism like other social grants such as the Child Support Grant in South Africa. Foster care can be further divided into kinship foster care as well non-kinship foster care. Kinship foster care is one of the most popular forms of foster care in South Africa, this kind of foster care happens when an orphaned child has been legally placed in foster care with his or her relatives whilst non-kinship foster care is when an orphaned child is placed with adults who have been screened and found suitable to foster the child who are not related to the child. Kinship foster care placements requires initial assessments of the child's current circumstances, but would not in most cases it would not involve the same intensive supervision as foster care placement.

2.3 FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS AND ABSENT FATHERS

Levels of absent fathers in South Africa are said to be high in comparison to other countries in sub- Saharan Africa (Posel & Devey, as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006), According to the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (2000), Zambia was also reported to have a 21.6 percentage of absent fathers of children below the age of 15 years old, Malawi had a 28.5 percentage of absent fathers (Malawi demographic and health survey, 2000) and Namibia had a 57.3 percentage of absent fathers while South Africa was reported to have a 51.1 percentage of absent fathers of children below the age of 15 years old. One important factor to take into account regarding the situation of absent fathers in South Africa is the long term

effect of the migrant labour system to which Africans, but not other races were subjected. Although the laws establishing the migrant labour system have since been repealed, migrant labour system still exists. In 2001 as according to the South African Institute of Race Relations (2011), some households were still reportedly receiving remittances from migrant workers. Some women still receive remittances as one of their sources of income. This can suggest that the numbers of men living and working away from their families are still high. As a result most children in South Africa are reported to be living in households with absent fathers. In situations where minors under the age of 18 years are orphaned particularly maternal orphans they are left vulnerable particularly if the father of the child was absent and not involved in the life of the child. Some children are often left in the care of grandparents and extended family members. The Children's Act makes provisions for such children to be eligible for some provision and protections from the state. Therefore the children become a responsibility of the state particularly if the family members are not able to look after the children and take care of their financial needs. Section 180 (1) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 describes foster care as the care of a child by a suitable person other than a parent or a guardian of the child under the age of 18 years. The purpose of this system according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 is to "protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support as well as connect children with other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime" (section 181(a) [b]). On the contrary, modern ways of living such as industrialization, contributes to the situation whereby relatives are seldom accessible to take full responsibility of orphaned children or of children whose fathers are absent from their lives. Children in such situations are then vulnerable. "In 1994, the Child Protection Unit opened 23,664 cases of child abuse compared to 35,838 cases in 1996. The majority of these were for sexual offences (62%) in 84% of the cases" (Pierce, 2004, p.819). This statistical report explains that the prevalence of absent fathers in the lives of children exposes children to being abused in their absence by other male figures such as uncles, step fathers, etc. (Richer & Morrell, 2006) on the contrary there are uncles and step fathers for instance who are good role models to children especially boy children who model mostly the male behaviour.

Sheafor and Horejsi (2006) argue that a child needs his or her biological parents and kin since they are central to his or her identity. Children placed in foster care especially with non-relatives are exposed to having an identity crisis and may experience difficulties such as emotional turmoil during their placements in foster care. Male children who grow up from

young ages whose fathers are absent from their upbringing are said to be more susceptible to being involved in violent crimes, substance abuse and other forms of ill behaviour because they do not have a father role to model or look up to (Sheafor and Horejsi, 2006).

2.4 LABOUR MIGRATION, POVERTY AND HIV AND AIDS AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO ABSENT FATHERHOOD

The history of absent fathers is attributed to various factors including structural (migration, urbanisation, poverty) and agency (voluntary neglect-Fathers who deliberately chose to be absent from the upbringing of the child). The stringent and forceful laws of the Apartheid regime regarding labour migration in South Africa dislocated many fathers from their children and limited the time that fathers spent with their children as Richter and Ramphele (as citied in Richer & Morrell, 2006) argue that some of the adverse outcomes of migration were the abandonment and neglect of children by their fathers caused by structural factors, while structural factors have an impact on father absence, agency which is the voluntary neglect of a child by a father also impacts on father absence. Some fathers are absent as a result of not acknowledging paternity (Hunter, as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006). In the African culture especially amongst the Zulu's and Swati's, if the biological father of the child has not paid 'lobola' (bride wealth) to the child's maternal family that father is seen as failing to build a home therefore they are automatically dismissed as fathers by the maternal families (Hunter, as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006). And if he has not gone through the process of 'lobola' before the child is born there is a cultural process of "ukubika kwe-sisu" which needs to be done whereby the father of the unborn child acknowledges paternity. The denial of paternity is another factor which contributes to absent fathers and results in fathers distancing themselves from their children (Hunter, as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006).

Poverty in South Africa goes alongside with a dislocated social structure whereby the harsh realities of rural poverty and impoverishment leaves fathers with little alternative but to leave their homes and look for money or a means of income to sustain their families. Lesejane (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006), notes that it is a social expectation for fathers to provide for their families and to take responsible for them. However, in an era of poverty and high unemployment rates in South Africa (Statistical Release P 0309.3, 2001) today Wilson (as cited in Richer & Morrell, 2006) argues that this has created a trend the rural areas of South Africa whereby poverty is joint with almost permanent absent fathers from their homes. It is

arguable that poverty which has a contributory factor to absent fathers which in turn is related to violence and violent crimes in South Africa Wilson (as cited in Richer & Morrell, 2006). In a study by Hunter (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006) it was established that fathers in the Zulu community who fail to take on the responsibility of providing for their families are perceived in the society as failures hence this suggest then that there are no other ways in which a man can be a father to his children if he is unable to provide for his children regardless of the harsh realities of poverty.

Fathers who are infected or affected with HIV and AIDS may be too sick to continue being in the labour market. As a result they may also start to depend on the government grants to sustain a living, some of the sharpest points that emerged from a study by Coetzee & Swartz (as cited in Richer & Morrell, 2006) which focused on Cape Town fathers whom were HIV positive reflected that the illness forced some fathers to make some tough decisions such as continuing to work to earn money for the children or resting. With regards to the South African history, Lurie (as cited in Schoofs, 2001) points out that the spread of sexually transmitted diseases which contributes to absent fathers is as simple as placing young men in single sex hostels far away from their homes and granting them easy access to alcohol, then allowing them to go to their partners every now and then.

2.5 APARTHEID, FORCED REMOVALS AND BREAKDOWN OF FAMILY LIFE

It is arguable that the Apartheid regime has come to end, however the effects of this regime are still visible in South African families until this day and poverty adds to the burden of families. Desertion by fathers is often prompted by their inability to bear the burden of being the primary providers. The burden of failure becomes intolerable for those who lack the capacity to generate income for their families (Ramphele & Rchter, 2006). The legacy of apartheid caused instability and relocation in families, the apartheid government through the forced removals that took place between the 1960s and the 1980s. Between the period of the 1960s and 1980s the apartheid government forcibly moved about 3.5 million black South Africans in certain areas (Henrard, 1996). This was mainly for the implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 which mandated for the removals of Blacks, Indians and Coloureds for the purposes of residential segregation throughout the country. Furthermore the Act

provided a way of facilitating control over the black urban population as it aimed at disuniting the Africans, Coloureds and Indians by dividing them in segregated urban townships.

The aim of the forced relocations was to divide and control racially separate communities at a time of growing organised resistance to apartheid in urban areas. Sophia town in Johannesburg was among the vibrant multi-racial communities that were destroyed by the apartheid government bulldozers when these areas were declared 'white' (Henrard, 1996) 492). This process ensured that blacks were violently removed to distant segregated townships, sometimes 30 kilometres from places of employment in the central cities. The force used was sometimes direct, through the use of police and guns, bulldozers demolishing houses and sometimes less overt, through intimidation, co-option of community leaders, the pressure of shops and schools being closed (Henrard, 1996).

Forced removals were an essential tool of the apartheid government's policy aimed at stripping all South Africans of any political rights as well as their citizenship in South Africa. Hundreds of thousands of blacks were moved to resettlement camps in homelands with no services or jobs (Huchzermeyer, 2004). Black people were dispossessed of land and homes where they had lived for generations in what the apartheid government called 'black spots' in areas that the government had designated as part of 'white' South Africa (Henrard, 1996). Generally the process was designed to promote black economic exploitation and white political domination. By the 1980s, popular resistance to removals was widespread, and the apartheid government's plans to remove up to two million more people were never carried out (Henrard, 1996).

2.6 FOSTER CARE AS AN ALTERNATIVE PLACE OF CARE

The post-apartheid era saw the new South African government transforming in order to address the imbalances of the past. One of its strategies in addressing the historic ills was to adopt the developmental approach to social service delivery. This newly adopted approach was premised on the principle of equality of all people, access to services, resources, social justice, and opportunities, and human rights, including the right to family care and the right to access to children (Osei-Hwedie, 2007). In order to formalise and regulate the services to be

implemented within the developmental approach, the government introduced The White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, Ministry for Social Welfare and Population Development, 1997), with an aim to shift all social service delivery from a narrow focused welfare approach to the comprehensive and holistic developmental approach. The adoption included a shift in all social services including family welfare services. Thus, it shifted the delivery of family care services from delivery within a residual approach, to delivery within a developmental approach (Patel, 2005).

Part of family care services, including the biological father's rights to access and care for biological children are mandated by the Children's Act 38 of 2005 which is the first child protection guideline to developmental child protection services in South Africa. Foster care is one of the developmental mechanisms which is aimed at benefitting the individual holistically. Foster care is all about family life and children. According to Whitelaw, Downs, Moore, McFadden, Michaud and Costin (2004) family foster care is social system with many component parts and complex interrelationships between those parts. The addition of a new, sometime unfamiliar child to the family introduces new possible ongoing stressors into the family, which influence all members of the family system return new effects. Nonetheless, the family system approach in social work offers a specific way of looking at and working with these families, enabling the practitioner to focus on the interacting family , as a whole not separating an individual behavior as problematic (Whitelaw et al, 2004).

Foster care is aimed at protecting children and keeping them safe, there are therefore some expectations of the foster family to ensure that the foster children are well taken care of. McFadden (1996) notes that foster parents are expected to provide children with a normal home and family life, to show care and acceptance to them similar to that of their own children. According to Thomas (2005), foster parents must be able to provide a warm and effective relationship with children and young people. The foster parent must provide good physical and psychological acre for the foster child. The foster parent must further enable the child to feel at home. Without disrupting their existing attachments, it is also important that the foster parents prioritize needs of the child and also work closely with social workers and other professionals (Thomas, 2005).

Dickerson and Allen (2007) maintain that it important that foster parents are screened to ensure the safety of the foster child, success of the placement and the continuation of family

life. It is also critical that these families are prepared and trained for fostering their foster children.

The role of the Welfare organisation in foster care according to Whitelaw et al (2004) is to monitor the placement and home circumstance continuously as they are responsible for children in foster care. Children in foster care need to be in proper care and proper treatment needs to be given. In South Africa, the National Department of Social Development designs, monitors and partly implements social welfare policy and it maintains the overall responsibility for managing statuary services (Thiele, 2005).

Foster parents are key persons involved in the delivery of treatment plan of every foster child and the success or failure of the life experience of these children (Silver, Amster & Haecker, 1999). In South Africa virtually all adult persons may apply to become a foster parents whether married, single, gay or in cohabitation relationships. Foster parents can be extended to family members, friends or strangers to the child. however all applicants or prospective foster care parents need to go through screening to ensure that they have the qualities, characteristics and ability in themselves and in relation to their circumstances, to take care of the children. The aim of this screening is also to recruit families who are able and may be able to provide the child's needs (Silver at al, 1999).

There are guidelines which are provided for in the White Paper on how to implement service delivery including how social workers are to protect vulnerable children through providing foster care placements for those that are in need of care. In the years that followed the initiation and implementation of the 1997 White Paper for Social Welfare, there were numerous debates, and studies done, which explored how social service delivery still lacked guiding principle on how service providers should deliver social services within a developmental approach. Kleijn (2004) undertook a study on the issue and found that although the White Paper for Social Welfare instructed that all social services to be implemented within a developmental approach, there was still a lack of guidelines on how certain services, including child and family welfare services would be delivered within a developmental approach. A few years after this research was conducted, there has been improvement to the development approach guidelines which now include clearly initiated policies, legislations and programmes that guide statutory social delivery within the development approach. The guideline, policies and legislation that are relevant to child

welfare service delivery include the Integrated Service Delivery Model (Department of Social Development, 2011), the Draft Policy of Families (Department of Social Development, 2011), the draft policy of foster care and the Children's Act 38 of 2005. The Department of Social Development (2011) argues that absent fathers are among the forces that have weakened family life. The authors further note that there are statistics showing the increasing number of children living without their biological parents, in particular their biological fathers, and a correlational increase of the evidence of weakened families (Ratele, Shefer & Clower, 2012).

2.7 EFFECTS OF ABSENT FATHERHOOD ON THE FAMILY LIFE

A study that was conducted by Kimani and Kombo (2010) on the challenges faced by nuclear families with absent fathers, revealed that children and youth respondents felt insecure and suffered stress more specifically most of those students never concentrated on their studies due to the uncertainty, a phenomenon which led to poor performance. Another problem that was identified in their study was the lack of financial support, children falling negative into negative peer pressure, early marriages and pregnancies for girls. The study revealed that the women in the study who formed part of the nuclear families that were interviewed demonstrated that that indecisiveness was amongst some of the challenges that they faced in homes with absent male partners (Kimani & Kombo, 2010). Indecisiveness was said to be costly and it slowed down important decisions on important family matters. Women were said to be overworked as they had to undertake all the family responsibilities, family maintenance and family matters. Another challenge which emerged in the findings was that sexually active women become promiscuous (Kimani & Kombo, 2010).

Kimani and Kimbo further (2010) indicated that both daughters and sons were affected in the situation of an absent father especially when the family's provision is inadequate or when mothers are too stressed to give them adequate attention. Many of them dropped out of school, boys were mostly affected for the lack of a role model to identify 60% of the respondents indicated that boys became more rebellious and involved in criminal activities. It is arguable that children in foster care are no exception to this phenomenon.

2.8 STUDIES CONDUCTED ON ABSENT FATHERS

A study conducted by Swartz and Bhana, titled "Teenage Tata: voices of young fathers in South Africa" (2009) notes that a negative construction of fathers, informed by normative assumptions of the nuclear family has been noted with unease in South Africa. Research has further documented how poverty, increasing unemployment and HIV have weakened men's capacity to meet conventional social roles of manhood and fatherhood (Mfecane, 2008). According to Ratele, Shefer and Clower (2012) men's ancient and modern positions as care-givers have to be understood in the framework of South Africa's history of violent gender, racial oppression and domination, particularly against African families, women and men. Langa (2010) challenged the one-dimensional and 'blaming' discourse on fathers, in South Africa, documenting multiple ways in which fathers care and play a role in the children's lives.

Equally significant, The Centre for Social Development in Africa, in collaboration with Sonke Gender Justice conducted a study on absent fathers and found that "South Africa has an exceptionally high number of absent fathers with approximately half of the children in the country living without daily contact with their fathers (Mazembo, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013). This situation presents social and developmental challenges" (Mazembo, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013). Of equal importance, the Health Sciences Research Council published a book titled "Baba – Men and fatherhood in South Africa" where Scholars from a range of backgrounds and disciplines break new ground as they explore the centrality of fatherhood in the lives of men and in the experiences of children. In this collection, authors show how understandings of fatherhood have changed over time. In addition, the authors offer answers to how men experience fatherhood and what obstacles bar men from expanding their engagement with children.

2.9 TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHERHOOD AND EFFECT OF LACK OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

In most African cultures the birth of a child is traditionally and ceremonially celebrated. There are many rituals which are performed from the birth of a child and throughout their entire life Mkhize (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006). For instance, in other communities

such as Transkei where the community holds strong values and believes about African traditions, during the ritual called “imbeleko” it is the father who provides a name and introduces the child to ancestors. It is believed then that failure to perform the “imbeleko” ritual for the child, the child will be exposed to misfortune which continues throughout his or her entire life (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). These rituals are performed according to the paternal clan and therefore the absence of a father means that those children may be deprived of such rituals and may be subjected to misfortune which continues for the rest of their lives as according to some African cultural beliefs.

Therefore the study is important to the profession of Social Work in that it enhances social workers knowledge in locating the cultural practices in the African traditional thinking. It will also assist to identify the cultural impact and implications of children who are brought up with absent living fathers and those whose paternal families are not present in their lives to perform such ceremonies for them. It is argued that even when other family male figures step in, the process as argued by Ramphele and Richter (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006, p. 78) becomes “denuded of its social meaning, ‘the ritual becomes a long, lonely process’ for those disadvantaged young men, without fathers or responsible male relatives”.

From practice and experience, one notes that very little is done by child protection social workers who place children in foster care when it comes to understanding the significance of cultural practices of children who are in foster care whose fathers are absent, despite the mandate from the Children’s Act 38/2005 which directs them to do so. Therefore, such children are excluded from cultural practices which involve fathers and their paternal families. Children who are placed in foster care as a result of father absence are exposed to various cultural belief systems and practices of their foster parents which may or may not always be necessarily similar to those of their biological father’s clan. Such children are exposed to identity confusion as they may not always fully identify with their foster families, as a result one finds children who as youths begin to ask many questions about their origins and also embark on journeys of father searching.

2.10 EFFECTS OF SINGLE PARENT HOMES ON CHILDREN

In Southern Africa fathers have been seen to play a major support role in the lives of children especially in terms of financial support. Fathers are perceived as providers to their families,

Hunter (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006) although this is not always the case. There are various types of fathers in the current South Africa as opposed to the traditional understanding of fatherhood they are the economic, the social and holistic. A study by Edwards, Boston, Kunene and Nene (2001) on traditional roles and responsibilities identify three roles of which are attached to particular responsibilities; these roles are the: the governor role whose responsibility is to represent the family in the community, the head of the family; the breadwinner- someone who providers, defends and protects the family; and the family role- someone who is a husband, a parent, and educator of the family (Edwards et al, 2001).

Results from a study conducted in Nigeria by Uchenna (2013) suggest that children's well-being is associated with participation in a wide range of activities with the parents. The ability of the custodial single parent to successfully provide a nurturing environment for the children appeared to be affected by the family's socio-economic status. Uchennna (2013) suggest that in general, single mothers have a harder time making ends meet. As a result of the financial strain experienced by many single mothers, they tend to be more anxious, depressed and over whelmed with parenting issues. Single father on the other hand, fared much better economically. They were able to maintain a socioeconomic status more similar to what the children experience before separation. Given these differences in environment, it is expected that children raised by single fathers would have a stronger sense of wellbeing than that children raised by single mothers (Uchenna, 2013).

Results regarding academic performance of children from single parent homes were also contradictory. Some researchers claimed that children in father led homes did better academically since fathers had greater economic resources and could provide better schools and more educational materials. Other researchers argue that the academic performance of children from mother led homes and father led homes did not differ dramatically, which corroborated without findings. Despite economic hardship mothers tended to be more involved in school functions and were more like to stay in touch with their children's teachers, which are factors that can enhance academic performance. This mixed picture suggests that single mothers and single fathers provide different types of resources and support for their children. Children appeared to profit psychologically and academically when both parents provide aspects of an orderly and nurturing home life (Uchenna, 2013).

One can further argue that it is not enough to know that a child comes from a single-parent home. But rather teachers, counsellors, educational psychologist and administrators need to have knowledge of those factors that affect children from single-parent homes to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of the children they are teaching. While many children in single-parent homes grow up into successful, mature adults, many children being raised in single-parent homes may not reach their full potential due to inadequate family resources (Uchenna, 2013). Teachers, counsellors, educational psychologist and administrators need to understand that children raised in struggling families need schools that are warm, nurturing, structured and authoritative. School personnel also need to provide support to the mother or father who is parenting solo. Having a teacher, counsellor or psychologist to consult and collaborate with, can be immeasurable help in rearing well-adjusted and successful (Uchenna, 2013).

2.11 INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES TO INVOLVE FATHERS

The problem of absent fathers is not only a South African occurrence; the international community has also been struggling with a similar challenge. Skevik (2004) portrays how Norway is one of the countries which have been encouraging father presence since the early 1990's. This is because the problem of father absence seemed to be increasing in Norway (Skevik, 2004). To support the fact that absent fathers is not a uniquely African problem, Morehouse Institute and Institute for American Value (1999) states that America is one of the countries which are faced with the problem of father's disappearing from their children's lives and being absent from their upbringing. This practice seems to have been tolerated and father absence is reported to keep increasing each year (Morehouse Institute & Institute for American Value, 1999). Magqaza (2001) notes that a continuous intergenerational norm of father absence keeps reoccurring in society when society accepts fathers absence as a norm, expected and anticipated to the extent that fathers are viewed as not needed in the upbringing of children. According to the statistics portrayed in the Morehouse Institute & Institute for American Value (1999), about four of every ten children in the United States live in homes with absent fathers and also spend a significant fraction of their upbringing apart from their fathers. In South Africa, a study by Posel and Devey (as cited in Richter and Morrell, 2006, p. 41) shows that "over 40% of men aged 15 to 54 years were counted as fathers in 2002, yet 57% of children were reported to be fatherless."

2.12 FATHER ABSENCE

Ramphele (as cited in Richter and Morrell, 2006) argues that the absence of a father always complicates the lives of children, especially the boy child whose fathers is the key role player in introducing him to the world of men. Although there are other male role models for the boy child such as his grandparents and so forth, in communities some cultural practices become meaningless if they are not traditionally performed by the child's father or paternal clan. A South African study by Timaeusa and Bolerb (2007) points out that generally children with absent fathers tend to perform less satisfactory with regards to their academic performance as compared to children who are brought up in households where both of their parents are present in the household. The authors further argue that boy children in particular who grow up with absent fathers in their lives tend to easily repeat the cycle of being absent fathers themselves. Patrick (2006) shows the detrimental effects that boy children who grow up with absent fathers are subjected to and argues that they seem to suffer more in terms of their school performance as well as in displaying unacceptable social behaviour. On the contrary a study by Mancini's (2010) demonstrates that girl children are also affected from father absence just like boy children, they too tend to perform badly at school and they also display anti-social behaviour.

2.13 FOSTER CARE GRANT AS ONE OF THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY

Midgley and Conley (2010) argue that social assistance programs are one of the government's strategies used to alleviate poverty. In developing countries where poverty levels are high like South Africa for example, social security has become a major area of interest for social workers. In view of social work's concern with social justice and human well-being which is aligned to the social development approach, Social Workers should be concerned with the development of appropriate social security systems which can be effectively implemented to benefit the individual holistically. Kaseke (2010) notes that South Africa's social security system consists of two components which are: social assistance as well as social insurance. The social assistance system consists of a means-test and it is granted only to designated groups, such as persons with disability, older persons as well as children (Kaseke, 2010). Within the social assistance system there are four programs in operation in South Africa these are namely: old age pension; child support grant; foster care grant and disability grant.

2.13.1 Old age Pension

It is arguable that because of the high unemployment rate in South Africa embedded in our history, one finds that many families rely on the Old Age Pension as one of the sources of income. An article in the Economics Journal of Transition (2008) alludes to the fact that the unemployment rate in South Africa has remained at high levels since 1994, as a result the study suggests that The Old Age Pension in households is often used to support other members of the household, including younger workers. In South Africa, women and men above the age of 60 receive an old age pension which amounts to R1200 every month. The old age pension is the "largest social assistance programme in rand terms" (Triegaardt and Patel, 2005, p. 129). Hence it is evident that through such a programme alleviating poverty among elderly people can be achieved. However while the core intention for the old age grant is to assist elderly people and to alleviate poverty among that particular group, one may argue that in South Africa for example, in light of the high rate of unemployment and the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, many elderly people who are in receipt of the old age grant do not only utilize that income to meet their own needs but the income is shared and distributed among other family members who are unemployed or to take care of their grandchildren who are orphaned and are placed legally under their foster care or as a private family arrangement under their care.

2.13.2 Foster care grant

The foster care grant is another social grant which amounts to R780 per month. Section 180 (1) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 describes foster care as the care of a child by a suitable person other than a parent or a guardian of the child under the age of 18 years. The purpose of this grant as according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 is to protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support. Another purpose of foster care is to enhance the goals of permanency planning, first towards family reunification, or by connecting children with other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime (section 181(a) [b]). The foster care grant is intended to assist the foster family financially in meeting the foster child's needs and protecting the child from suffering financial constraints, however, on the other hand it is arguable that one cannot meet all the basic needs of a child which are amongst others school uniform, food, clothes, shelter, sanitation, power and others, with the amount that is given as the foster care grant, especially

in light of the countries high unemployment rate (Journal of Economics in Transition, 2008) hence it is arguable that foster parents may find themselves having to contribute from their own income towards fulfilling the child's basic needs . However the grant itself is not the core of foster care, as foster care is focused rather on the holistic development and provision of the child (Thomas, 2005).

2.14 CHILDREN'S NEED FOR A FATHER

Factors such as human capital, financial capital and social capital are some of the factors which fathers contribute to the lives of children. Fathers can provide for their children and also be a part of their lives in various ways and fatherhood can be defined and expressed through different ways such as culture, social and individual differences (Richter, 2002). Children whether adopted, abandoned, deserted or in foster care have a yearning to find their biological fathers who are absent from their lives. Such is evident in television programs and newspaper such as the Sunday Times, 14 November 2004-article whereby a child was yearning to find her absent father after the death of her mother (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

Richter and Morrell (2006) argue that children express a general 'father need' and that in the absence of a biological father children displace this feeling on other male figures in their community. The role of a father and the presence of a father and his involvement in the child's life is said to be of importance as it fosters positive effects on the life chances of the child. it is said that father presences impacts greatly on the child's educational outcomes, health, and physical, emotional and cognitive development of a child Engle, Beardshaw & Loftin (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006). A South African study by Timaeusa (2007) also affirms that children who grow up in households with present fathers tend to perform better than children who are in households with absent fathers. Whilst there are numerous studies which show that the absence of a father in the upbringing of a child yields maladjusted children, one also needs to look at cases where fathers are absent and mothers as well as grandmothers raise balanced and socially adjusted children who grow up to be responsible adults, so one cannot simply assume that the absence of a father automatically leads to maladjusted and delinquent children. Again there are children who grow up in foster care families who with absent fathers who did not drop out of school or display behavioural problems.

2.15 FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS

Many families were disrupted because of the migrant labour system; men had to leave their families and children in search for employment opportunities (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). The images of stable, happy and responsible families of caring fathers in the minds of the young people who were part of their study were created by their grandparents (Ramphele & Richter, 2006) In the urban areas Holborn and Eddy (2011) argue that approximately 35% of South African children are reared in a household with both parents present, while 40% are reared by their mother and 2.8% by their fathers. It is argued that the average South African child is reared in a single-parent household, usually headed by a mother and over half of all children under the age of 18 years will spend some time in single-parent household (Magnusan and Berger, 2009). While one may argue that it is important for children to grow up with their fathers, the reality is that some men do not take the responsibility of being a father due to the reasons discussed in the previous chapters. Nonetheless whilst father's material contribution constitutes a second to the development of their children, many households are female-headed and the significance of this phenomenon has been debated in literature. Davids and Romans (2013) argue that typically, single parents are often presented in research studies as being female, living in a low socio-economic environment, being socially isolated, having lower emotional and parental support, and working longer hours than their two-parent counterparts. Subsequently, children raised in single-parent families have less parental observation and supervision than children who are reared in married families and are often considered at-risk (Magnuson & Berger, 2009). However, while this may be true, it is also arguable that those children raised in single-parent families are nonetheless provided stable and happy lives (Ramphele & Richter, 2006).

The general conclusion has been that children who grow up with the presence of their fathers and their father's income tend to be better of whilst those who live in female-headed households are assumed to be generally poorer. There is however some variation depending on the female's social and economic class. On the contrary some literature demonstrates that children in female-headed households are not always more poorly nurtured than children who are in male-headed households. In Urban Guatemala, for instance studies have shown that children in female-headed households, although a small percentage, were found to be better nurtured than those in families in which both parents were present (Engle, 1995).

In their study Silverstein and Auerbach's (1999) finding demonstrated that father is not necessarily essential in the life of a child's and that such responsibility can be executed by a responsible adult who provides a stable and consistent environment for the child. These responsible adults can range from the child's mother, and extended family members. Louw (2013) further asserts that, for a long time, child-rearing in South Africa has been characterised by multi-caregivers in the lives of children, such as grandparents and members of the extended family. Mkhize (2006) further attests that while the nuclear family is the prevailing family pattern in most western cultures, sub-Saharan societies tend towards collectivism. Individuals become members of extensive networks through birth and marriage. Family and friends try to encourage a sense of belonging through these social networks. Mkhize (2006) argues that it is not a parent's sole responsibility to raise a child but that the extended family members take responsibility in doing so. Members of the extended family are expected to take part an active role in raising their relatives children. Whist members of the extended family play a vital role and exert influence in the raising of children particularly in the rural contexts Nsamenang (2000) argues that they are fast losing control over individual welfare and family security. Urbanisation, poverty and the rate of HIV and AIDS infection are some of the social ills which cause a decline in such a practise.

2.16 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.16.1 Systems theory

System theory aims at understanding how different system's interact with each other and influence each other (Payne, 2005). This theory acknowledges that individuals form part of systems which in turn influences them, it further takes into account that individuals do not grow up in a vacuum but amongst others systems which are the micro, meso and macro systems which play a role in shaping the perceptions of an individual. In this regard the child's immediate system is the family which is responsible for the child's upbringing. Different roles are ascribed to each family member for instance the in the nuclear family, the mother is mostly responsible to nurture the children, the father is perceived as the provider and head of the family. The boy child learns to be a man by modelling his father's behaviour in the house he is socialized into manhood primarily from modelling what his father does in and around the house. The girl child also learns from her mother's behaviour and through modelling her mother's behaviour. With this being said, it is therefore a challenge for

children especially boy children who grow up in family systems with absent fathers as they not have an immediate role model whose behaviour they can model. Instead, in this regard some children whose fathers are absent within the family system may have to find role models from other social systems such as the community, schools etc. which may replace or model the father role in their lives, this may then foster their development and assist in their upbringing and enable them to embody their social roles as they become adults. These systems may even encourage children to also want to be better parents and present fathers in their own children's lives. The foster family is another system which serves as a support system for children who grow up in foster care, the foster parents also play an important role in socializing the foster children.

2.16.2 The Social Constructionist approach

The social constructionist approach focuses on how language is used and the influence that discourse has on the construction of being a father. Some of the primary principles of social constructivism are the creation of reality through discourse, anti-realism, anti-essentialism and a focus on interaction and social practice (Kiguwa, 2004). In other words fatherhood is a social construct created though everyday language. These social constructs as one can argue are therefore interlinked to the roles of parenting; it is through the process of socialization that society expects people for instance mothers and fathers to behave in certain ways, it is through language that mothers are seen as nurturers of children and fathers as providers. Therefore, the discourse that fathers are not only providers but can be nurtures too should be promoted in societies so that even fathers who are unable to provide for their children do not as result decide to be absent from their lives. But they can be there for their children in other ways. In this regard foster parents also play an important role in socializing foster children whose fathers are absent from their lives, in some foster families one finds that the foster children relate to their foster mother's partner's as father. Some children are even taught to call their foster parent's significant others as father. It is therefore evident that language is used to create and recreate the world around us These theories were relevant in understanding fatherhood and father absence in South Africa, as they provide the premise to understanding the prevalence of the phenomenon in South Africa.

2.17 SUMMARY

This chapter was dedicated to reviewing literature that was relevant to the study conducted. It provided a brief review of the policies that focus on fatherhood and family life in the South African context as well as international policies on how to involve absent living fathers in their children's lives. Traditional views on the importance of fatherhood were discussed and illustrations from other studies which were conducted on absent living fathers were deliberated upon. Labour Migration, Poverty and HIV/AIDS were some of biggest contributors of absent fathers whilst the empowerment of women through gender mainstreaming initiatives were perceived to be one of the many aspects that contribute to women being away from home and moving from the traditional view that women are care givers and nurtures whilst fathers are viewed as providers. Children are exposed to vulnerability once their mothers pass on and this vulnerability is intensified in the cases whereby the father also abandoned them or is an absent living father. The Children's Act 38 of 2005, as amended, describes such children as children who are in need of care and protection. Thus the South African government adopted the foster care system as a mechanism to protect and shield such children. Foster parents are therefore recruited, screened and trusted to provide homes, adult supervision and conducive environments for the children to grow up in.

The systems theory acknowledges the importance of how different systems interact with each other and the impact that they have on each other. It also recognizes that individuals do not grow up in vacuums but that they grow up amongst other systems such as the family, community and society at large. The social constructionist approach informs us that social practises are created, encouraged and relived through the process of socialization. It is therefore important that our societies begin to promote and perceive fathers not only as providers but also as nurtures who can take care of the children and raise them. The next chapter proffers the methodology used in carrying out the study.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Foster care placement has been viewed as an alternative means of placement for children who are orphaned and abandoned amongst other things, when these children are deemed to be in need of care and protection by the court magistrates they are placed under the care of foster parents who are either kin or non-kin. Literature points out that there are many causes for fathers to abandon their children before and even after their mothers deaths including poverty and the stringent and forceful laws of the Apartheid regime regarding labour migration in South Africa which dislocated many fathers from their children and limited the time that fathers spent with their children as Richter and Ramphele (as citied in Richer & Morrell, 2006). It is due to this vulnerability of the children then that social workers working together with the magistrates courts place the children in foster care placements who have been screened. Therefore this study focuses on the experiences of foster parents who raise children with absent living fathers. Thus the focus of this study was to explore the experiences of foster care parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers. In this chapter, the research question, research sub questions, primary aim, secondary objectives, the research approach, type of research, the research design, methodology, trustworthiness, pilot study and ethical aspects related to the study and the empirical research findings of the study will be discussed. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the findings cannot be generalised to all foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers.

3.2 RESEARCH SITE

The study took place in Msukaligwa, a local municipality which is situated in the Gert Sibande District. The Gert Sibande district is composed of seven municipalities namely: Albert Luthuli, Dipaliseng, Goven Mbeki, Lekwa, Mkondo, Pixely ka-Seme as well as Msukaligwa, the District is one of the four district municipalities in Mpumalanga. The Gert Sibande district is situated in the eastern boundary of the Mpumalanga province and borders of Swaziland and Mozambique. Gert Sibande shares boundaries with the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal in the south and Gauteng in the West. It is said that the estimated population of the Gert Sibande is 1,043,194 which constitutes 24.4% of the total population in Mpumalanga. It

was established that Msukaligwa contributes of 149,377 of the total population which equates to 14% of the Gert Sibande district. Some of the areas which the municipality consists of are Breyten, Camden, Chrissiesmeer, Davel, Jericho, Lothair, Sheepmoor, Warburton as well as Ermelo where most of the participants who participated in the study reside.

According to the Census administered in 2011, it was established that there are 88.1% Black Africans who make up the total population of the Msukaligwa local municipality as well as 9.8% of the population are white, 1.1% of the population are Indian/Asian and 0.6% are coloured whilst other population groups make up the remaining 0.3% of the population. Of those who are aged 20 years old and above only 4.5% have completed primary school which is grade R to grade seven, 32.7% have some secondary education, 29.3% have completed matric, 9.6% have some form of higher education and 12.3% have no form of schooling at all. Some of the popular languages of communication which are used in the municipality are isiZulu, Isidnebele, isiSwati, English and Africans.

In Msukaligwa there are natural assets such as vast tracts of agricultural land and livestock including poultry. There are also physical assets such as schools, roads, and clinics, with regards to human capital, most of the young people are unemployed and there is an increasing rate of children who are dropping out of school.

3.2.1 Research question

The research intended to answer the following research question:

- What are the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers?

3.2.2 Research sub-questions

Sub-questions that assisted the researcher in answering the research question of the study were as follows:

- What are the challenges or opportunities of fostering children with absent fathers who are placed in foster care?

- What are the foster parent's experiences of fostering children whose fathers are absent from their lives?

3.2.3 Primary aim:

The primary aim of the study was as follows:

- To explore the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers.

3.2.4 Secondary objectives:

The secondary objectives of the study were as follows:

- To establish the socio-cultural implications of raising African foster care children with absent fathers.
- To investigate whether father absence is something that is talked about in foster care families.
- To explore some of the challenges and opportunities that foster parents are faced with when raising a children whose fathers are absent.
- To explore the support systems that foster parents have in raising foster children with absent fathers.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study utilised a qualitative approach which aided in the creation of a coherent picture of the experiences of foster parents as it is seen through their eyes. "Qualitative research is an overarching term for research methodologies aiming to explore, describe and explain persons' experiences, behaviours, interactions and social contexts without the use of statistical procedures or quantification but rather through textual data or words" (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002, p.717). According to Langford (2001, p. 139), "Qualitative research is an objective way to study the subjective human experience using non-statistical methods of analysis. Qualitative researchers may seek to examine individuals' lives and their

stories and behaviour; organisations and their functioning; role relationships and intercommunications; or cultures and their conduct, interactions and social movement." Creswell (2003, p. 104) agrees and state that qualitative research is undertaken with the aim to "explore", "discover" "develop an understanding", "describe" and "report" on a certain phenomenon. The researcher used a qualitative approach to conduct the research. According to Fouché and Schurink (in De Vos et al. 2011,p. 308), "The qualitative approach aims to understand, observe, explore and obtain a realistic and descriptive perspective from respondents who have direct experience of what is being researched." The research sought to understand and explore the experiences of foster parents who are African foster care children.

There is no significant information on the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers. This is a topic which required an in-depth exploration. Therefore, a qualitative approach was the most suitable approach for the study. A qualitative approach is more concerned with the "what" questions, which was exactly what the study sought answers for (Fouché & De Vos, 2011). Moreover, the researcher wanted to gain an understanding of the perceptions and not to explain them, which was best fulfilled within a qualitative approach (Fouché & Delport, 2011). Lastly, a qualitative approach did justice to the study in that it enabled the researcher to report on the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study was exploratory in nature. The exploratory role was useful in allowing the in-depth exploration into the experiences of foster care parents who are raising African children with absent fathers. The exploratory design allowed the researcher to explore and examine all aspects of the research problem with the purpose of finding more from the participants. Babbie and Mouton (2001) argue that exploratory studies usually lead to insight and comprehension of the study underway

The researcher made use of a qualitative research design, of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers. An explorative study enabled the researcher to gather detailed and rich-in-context information from the research participants (Fouché & Schurink, 2011). A research design is a "plan or strategy specifying the [how and from where

participants will be selected], the data gathering techniques to be used and [how] the data collection will be done" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p.70).

3.5 Population and sampling of participants

The researcher used purposive sampling, the participants were selected based on their specific and similar characteristics. The participants were contacted telephonically after they were identified from the Msukaligwa foster care data base.

A total of twenty participants took part in the study. They consisted of foster parent who are in foster care relationships with children whose fathers are absent in their lives. The sampling method that was used is purposive sampling that is a type of non-probability sampling. (Rubin & Babbie, 2011), Strydom & Delport, in De Vos et al. 2011 note that this strategy was aimed at choosing people with specific characteristics which were needed to conduct the research. The purposive sampling method allowed the researcher to purposely seek typical and divergent data (Rubin & Babbie, 2011), Strydom & Delport, in De Vos et al. 2011, p. 392). This was vital to the study in that, "a sample of information rich participants" was selected (Struwing & Stead, 2001, p. 122). The inclusion criteria for participants were male and female foster parents between the ages of 25 years old and above. The participants were invited through the Department of Social Development database for Msukaligwa Sub-District office and were contacted telephonically by the researcher. Msukaligwa participants were chosen as it was convenient for the researcher in terms of accessibility.

3.6.2 Research tool

The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview schedule as the research tool to conduct the study. It is argued that semi-structured interview schedules involve a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered and that there is flexibility from both the interviewer and the interviewee (Greenstein et al., 2003). The interviewer used a set of open-ended questions which allowed the researcher to clarify any unclear statements as well as ambiguous statements, in this way rich data could be obtained.

3.6.3 Pilot Study

Pre-testing allowed the researcher to see if the words and questions were appropriate and feasible to be utilised. The pre-test further assisted the researcher to point out if there were any unknown errors that the researcher had made when constructing the interview schedule (Babbie, 2007). As a pre-test measure the researcher interviewed one of the foster parents to critique the research tool and determine whether the interview schedule was relevant to the foster parents within the researched context.

3.6.4 Methods of data collection

In-depth information was collected in the form of face to face interviews. The interviews were tape-recorded; transcribed and verbatim quotes were selected from the participants based on their relevance to the study. Through the interviews the researcher obtained information regarding challenges that foster parents experienced in raising African children in foster care whose fathers are absent. The data collected were used to understand and analyse the experiences that foster parents face. The time allocated for data collection was initially four weeks, however due to the unavailability of some foster parents, the period was extended to six weeks.

3.6.5 Analysis of data

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis where themes were identified and then were further broken down into sub-themes. Priest, Roberts and Woods (2002) state that, thematic content analysis is a way of organizing a thematic analysis of qualitative data. The researcher used a thematic analysis as it sought to "unearth the themes salient in the text at different levels, and thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes" (Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2002, p.387). The researcher sifts sorted and analysed data obtained according to the eight steps of qualitative data analysis constructed by Tesch (in Creswell as cited by Alpaslan, 2010, p.26). In accordance with the Tesch's model, the researcher analysed data in an eight step format, using the following manner:

The researcher wrote down word for word, the audio taped interviews which were conducted with the participants as part of data collection. After, having completed this, the researcher

then read through all the data to get a sense of themes and subthemes that were apparent. After the researcher read through all the transcripts carefully, the researcher then made notes of the ideas relating to the identified themes as they came to mind. Secondly, the researcher selected one transcribed interview which seemed to be the most intensive and interesting, the researcher then went through it asking herself about the responses which were proffered by the foster parent who participated in the study and the researcher then focused on the underlying meaning of the responses and not on the content of the information. The researcher then wrote down her thoughts on the margin of the page.

The researcher continued reading all the remaining transcripts and upon completion thereof, the researcher made a list of all the topics that were identified and then put similar topics together, then listed all the topics in columns and categorised them accordingly as "major topics", "unique topics " and "leftovers". The researcher then found fitting abbreviations for each of the identified topics. The researcher continued to find the most descriptive wording for the identified topics and then turned them into themes and subthemes. The researcher then made a final decision on the abbreviation for each theme and alphabitisised these codes, and using the cut and paste method, the researcher assembled the data belonging to each theme in one place and then did a preliminary analysis. Lastly, the researcher then recorded the existing data and then started to report on the research findings and integrating the acquired data with the literature on the topic.

3.6.6 Measures taken to enhance data credibility, trustworthiness, reliability and validity

In order to enhance credibility the researcher described the setting, in other words the environment, as well as the population and theoretical frameworks. The interviews with the participants were held in the Msukaligwa boardroom of the Department of Social Development in Mpumalanga whilst others were held at the participants' homes. Correspondence checking was used to check for themes in the collected data. According to Greenstein et al. (2003) credibility refers to the believability and the vales of the researcher's findings in representing the real world as perceived by the participants in the study.

The practice of reflexivity was applied as a strategy for self-awareness. Mason (1996) notes that reflexivity refers to an attitude of systematically attending to the effect of the researcher

at every step of the research process. Reflexivity refers to the essential process in qualitative research whereby the researcher reflects continuously on how his or her values, beliefs, perceptions and actions impact upon the research setting and can affect data collection and analysis (Lembert, Joneema & Mc Sherry, 2010). The researcher did self-introspection about some of her beliefs and influences around child abandonment and absent fathers throughout the data collection, analysis and report writing process. The researcher was enabled to demonstrate a methodological and theoretical appreciation, openness and awareness of interactions between the researcher and the participants (Lembert *et al*, 2010). Through reflexivity the researcher was able to ensure that the researchers role is understood and to ensure that the findings represent the experiences of the foster care parents' experiences of raising children with absent fathers in foster care rather than the preferences of the researcher.

In addition, the researcher enhanced data credibility and trustworthiness through prolonged and repeated sessions until data saturation occurred, as suggested by (Creswell, 2009, p.192). In addition, the researcher read interview transcripts numerous times until she captured accurate descriptions of the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers. Moreover, member checking was the most critical technique for establishing credibility. This entailed interpreting the information and then checking with the participants if the interpretation and thematic analysis was consistent, correct, and congruent with their experiences, as suggested by Creswell (2009:191). Besides enhancing credibility this was also essential in ensuring that information is not subjectively interpreted, as suggested by (Rubin and Babbie, 2011).

Furthermore, the researcher thrived to provide thick description of the research setting (context) and observed transaction and processes, in-depth discussion of findings and themes as a mechanism of ensuring rigor and transferability of data to other settings, as suggested by (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). Lastly, the researcher employed data neutrality as a way of safeguarding against attaching preconceived ideas or own perceptions on the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers, as suggested by Creswell (2009). This was achieved through maintaining neutrality, avoiding being judgemental and being mindful while becoming closely involved with the participants' perceptions and experience.

To enhance reliability and effectiveness the researcher made use of pre-tests and clearly conceptualised all constructs in order to avoid ambiguity in the questions asked.

3.6.7 Strengths of the research methodology

The following were identified as strengths of the research methodology:
During the interview procedure the researcher was able to observe non-verbal communication. This assisted the researcher to probe more and to ensure that the participant's body language was consistent with what was being said. Face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher the opportunity to clarify any ambiguous statements in the case of inconsistencies. Face to face interviews also allowed for a collection of in depth data and the researcher could pose additional questions to follow up on what needed to be elaborated upon.

3.6.8 Weaknesses of the research methodology

The following weaknesses were identified:
The interviewer could have been biased and could have misunderstood some of the responses. To avoid this challenge, the researcher probed and paraphrased the statements that were made by the participants. The research did not focus on the absent fathers themselves to find out from them what made them to a decision of being absent from their children lives, as well as the challenges that they face in being absent fathers.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics can be described as "a set of moral principles suggested by an individual or group, and which is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behaviour expectations about the most correct (and appropriate) conduct towards experimental subject and respondents/participants, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students." (Strydom, in De Vos et al. 2011, p.57).

Throughout the entire research process, the researcher maintained an active awareness and adherence to the following ethical issues:

3.7.1 Avoidance of harm

Since the purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of foster parents raising African foster care children with absent fathers, there was bound to be some emotional issues at play because of the demands and pressure of the foster parents. The researcher took all the required pre-cautions, as suggested by Taylor (2000) to ensure adherence to the principle of avoidance of harm, so that the study did not leave the participants psychologically distressed. To minimise the possibility of harm resulting from the study, the researcher thoroughly informed all the participants about the potential impact of the study and then gave every participant the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they so wished (Rubin & Babbie, 2011).

3.7.2 Voluntary participation

The participants were informed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw their participation at any point in time during the study and there would be no consequences as a result. Kumar (2011) argues that participants should be informed about the nature of their participation prior to their participation. During the process of the study no incentives were provided to the participants with the intention of inducing participation. The participants were given the participation information sheet (Appendix A) to read which pointed out to the aim of the study and what it entailed. The participants were also given a consent form (Appendix B) that they signed to indicate that they agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were used as a method of data collection.

3.7.3 Informed consent

The researcher adhered to the principle of informed consent by providing adequate and all possible information to participants selected for the study on the goal and objectives of the study, the procedures followed during the interviews, the possible advantages and disadvantages of the study as well as the credibility of the researcher (Strydom, in De Vos et al. 2011). After all the above-mentioned information regarding the study had been disseminated, the participants were in a position to choose to participate or not to participate

in the study (Taylor, 2000). The researcher never coerced any foster parent to participate in the study; she adhered to the principle of voluntary participation (Babbie, 2001). The researcher asked each participant to sign a consent letter prior to the first interview session. Key information regarding the informed consent form was repeated at the beginning of every interview session and the researcher clarified any uncertainties to the participants (see appendix B).

3.7.4 Deception

No form of deliberate deception was inflicted on the participants of this proposed study (Strydom, in De Vos et al. 2011). No information was withheld from participants (Struwig & Stead, 2001). There was no hidden agenda in this study and every participant was given adequate and correct information (Taylor, 2000). According to Neuman (2003) deception occurs when the researcher intentionally misleads participants through written of verbal instructions, the actions of others or aspects of the setting. For the purpose of this study, the participants who were interested in taking part in the study were given a participation information sheet which consisted of a truthful description of the what the study entailed.

3.7.5 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

The researcher asked the participants to treat the information shared during the interview sessions with the strictest confidence. The researcher informed the participants that tape recorders and field notes were to be used to record data and also sought permission from them to use these two data gathering instruments. The participants were also informed that the researcher will compile a research report to be submitted to the University of Witwatersrand for academic purposes and that a possible publication of a scientific article on the topic might follow. However, the researcher also assured them that no information that would identify them (particularly, names, surnames and addresses) would be included in the transcriptions, research report and any other further publications.

3.7.5 Publication of findings

The researcher reported the findings of this study in a morally and ethically sound manner. The researcher strived to ensure that nobody is deceived by the findings by not manipulating

the results and by compiling the research report as far as possible in an accurate and objective manner (Strydom, in De Vos et al. 2011). The unearthed limitations of the study were reported and the shortcomings of the study were also stated (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). The work of others, sources and publications consulted by the researcher were properly acknowledged and correctly referenced to avert plagiarism (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

3.7.7 Debriefing of participants

Lastly, the researcher informed the participants about the debriefing sessions which were made available for any of them that need debriefing. None of the participants made use of the debriefing sessions.

3.8 SUMMARY

The chapter presented the research methodology that guided the research study. This included a detailed explanation on the research approach, research design, study population, sampling, data collection, data analysis and ethical issues. Chapter four will present and discuss the research findings. The next chapter further discusses, the biographic details of participants in a narrative format, and where applicable, followed by a graphical illustration of the findings. The findings from semi-structured interviews are discussed by means of themes and sub-themes, which are also presented in a hierarchical tree diagram. The discussion and analysis of data is supplemented by the voices of the participants by means of direct quotes. The verification of findings with literature is done in a separate discussion section following the presentation of the findings.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Different kinds of families exist in South Africa such as the nuclear family; child-headed family, female-headed family including foster families amongst many others. Although foster families share some common similarities, the experiences of the foster parents are different from individual to individual and the foster parent's experiences are not homogenous. As a result many differing views can arise about foster care parent's experiences within a community, with one group experiencing certain impacts and the other group experiencing something completely different.

At the same time each foster parent in the study presented with unique as well as similar perceptions experiences, challenges, as well as opportunities of raising African children who are with absent living fathers. Therefore the data collected using qualitative methodology provided the researcher with a broad spectrum of perceptions, experiences, opportunities and challenges of these foster parents. The data obtained will be presented in the form of themes and the researcher will corroborate the findings by quoting direct verbatim statements to concisely capture the views of the participants and where applicable the findings will be substantiated by literature, the limitations about the meaning of such results will also be presented. The first category will present the demographic and biographic details of the participants. The second category will present the themes as they emerged from the data.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This section describes the profile of the 20 participants that took part in the interviews. The data is divided into age, gender and levels of education

Table 4.1: Profile of foster parents (N=20)

Demographic information	Sub category	No.
Gender of foster parents	Men	01
	Women	19
Age range	25-35 years old	02

	36-45 years old	04
	46-55 years old	07
	56-65 years old	04
	65 and above	03
Level of education	Primary	11
	Secondary	03
	Tertiary	00
	Other (never attended school)	06

The diversity evident in the participants contributed to the diversity in their responses as well as similarities. This provided an interesting perspective on foster parent's experiences on raising African children in foster care as they are influenced by a variety of issues and circumstances.

The participants that took part in the study who were the children's foster parents were all related to the children and their late mothers. They were all maternal relatives such as one uncle, aunts and grandparents of the children whom they fostered. Nineteen of the twenty participants were female whilst only one of the twenty of the participants was a maternal uncle. Of the twenty participants seven were reportedly receiving an Old Age Grant as one of the sources of income and were dependent on it. The employment status of the other thirteen foster parents varied from casual employment to informal employment. The foster parents noted that they were the sole breadwinners in their households and responsible for all the other family members. Whilst six of the twenty participants maintained that some of the young adults in their households are employed in informal sectors, fourteen of the twenty participants noted that they are the only family members who provide for their families.

The family constituents of the foster parents including the foster children varied. One of the twenty participants maintained that her family consisted of twelve members including her foster child, one of the twenty participants noted that his family constituted of ten family members, one of the participants noted that her family constituted of eight family members, two of the twenty participants noted that their families constituted of seven family members including the foster child. One of the twenty participants noted that her family constituted of six family members, five of the twenty participants noted that their families constituted of five family members, whilst two of the twenty participants stated that their families constituted of four family members and four of the twenty participants noted that their

families constituted of three family members and only two of the twenty participants noted that their families constitutes of two family members including the children whom they foster.

4.3 THEME 1: CHILD BEARING OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE

4.3.1 Children born to wedded and unwedded parents

One of the findings in this study was that all participants reported that their foster children were born out of wedlock. 60% of the deceased mothers were adults whilst 30 % of them were youths and only 10 % of them were still teenagers. The outcomes of this study also demonstrated that twenty of the participants noted that the children's late mothers and absent fathers were not legally married. It was suspected fourteen of the twenty foster parents that their children in the care were fathered by married men who had intimate relationships with the mothers of the children. These suspicions amongst other things were mainly stirred by the nature of relations that the late mothers had with the father of the children. They were further stirred by the fact that these fathers did not want to be known and the late mothers also seemed ashamed to speak of them as they knew their marital status. Nineteen of the participants mentioned that the children's late mothers were neither customarily married to these absent fathers or in civil unions with them except for one participant who noted that her late daughter was paid only half of brides wealth for and the child's father disappeared before finishing the requested amount for lobola. It was said that their relationship did not go well and the child's father relocated to another town because of work commitments. It seems that he then settled there and stopped visiting the child and the late mother, eventually it was said that he relocated to another town in search of employment and ended up losing contact with the child, especially after the mother passed on.

The increase of absent living fathers can be credited to many environmental factors including the marital status of the mother and father. Budlender, Chobokoane and Simelane (2005) suggest that the proportion of women aged between fifteen to forty five years old currently married declined from 35% in 1995 to 30% in 1999. A survey by Posel (2011) further demonstrates that marriage rates have fallen. It is further argued that the low and declining rates of marriage are associated with poverty and the impact of the Apartheid policies, rather than being the effect of female empowerment and mainstreaming.

Wineburgh (2000) notes that there has been a steady growth in the number of children who are born to unmarried mothers. It was stated that children who are born in family structures where the mother is unmarried yet cohabits with the child's father are three times more likely to experience father absence, while children born to unwed, non-cohabiting parents are four times likely to experience father absence during their childhood (Kevrkian, 2010).

One participant expressed her disappointment in the following words" *I brought my child up in a Christian family and I taught her all the values of Christianity, I did not want her to repeat the same mistakes as I did (meaning bearing children out of wedlock). I was disappointed when I found out that she was pregnant. I told her not to have sexual relations before marriage, I wished she had listened to me…sobbing…boys run away after they impregnate a girl only a few of them stick around and actually marry her after she has fallen pregnant."*

4.3.2 Sub theme 2 "Ukukipita"-Cohabitting

The study showed that 7 of the 20 participants noted that the children's late mothers and absent fathers cohabited for a few years before and during the births of the children whom they foster. The perceptions of the foster parents were that these cohabiting set ups were not necessarily with the intention of marriage as none of them (the biological mothers) were even paid brides wealth for except for one participant who stated that her daughter was only paid half of total bride wealth for.

In many countries including South Africa, non-marital cohabitation has been noted as one of the most significant changes in nuclear household structures. In South Africa non marriage among Africans seems to have been rare, however Posel (2014) argues that as marriage rates have fallen, cohabitation rates have increased; in 1995 only 5% of African women aged 20-45 years reported cohabiting with a partner, by 2008 this had increased to 14%. The reason for this may be due to many reasons including the fact that cohabitation is easier and less expensive than financial demands involved in planning for a marriage. If a man and a woman decide to cohabitate, they can easily do so without the involvement of family members or like one would do in preparing for a marriage. The reason for an increase in cohabitation may also be a way of how couples in the cohabitation set up are trying to save monetary wise. For example if a couple is dating and each individual has his or her own flat, but they find that

they spend most of their time together, or that the one partner spends more time by the other partner's flat, it may make good economic sense for the couple to move in together therefore saving extra rent money and even travelling fares. Some individuals cannot simple afford to pay rent and own a car for example or live off the income that they receive, cohabiting makes it easier for them. The employment rates in South Africa are high and some jobs favour more skilled workers or those with certain educational qualifications making employment difficult and almost impossible for those individuals who do not have such (Economics of Transition, 2008).

One of the twenty participants felt unsure about cohabiting as he felt that it has become a norm in society and the nineteen participants felt that cohabiting was wrong and that people should be married in order to live together as husband and wife. The participants in the study noted that women are disadvantaged in such settings as they are expected to perform all the wifely duties such as cooking, cleaning and looking after the household and at the end of the day they are never married by these men who they cohabit with. Sixteen of the twenty participants noted that cohabiting makes it easy for men to just leave women if and when they feel like doing so without having to suffer the consequences or doing so. The participants maintained that uKukiphita is shunned upon in the African culture however with modernisation it is gradually becoming a norm. They noted that in traditional African cultures, the families of the cohabiting outside marriage couple do not get involved in their issues and problems as much as they would if the couple were married. Therefore it was stated that before couples go through a divorce, family members would be involved in trying to resolve their problems. However the participants felt that in cohabiting relationships men or women can just easily walk out of such a relationship at any time without necessarily having to account to anyone or elders.

In their study Posel and Rudwick (2014) highlighted that some studies have perceived cohabiting as having negative consequences for women. The participants in their study further perceived cohabiting amongst Zulu people as wrong and unacceptable, this is similar to the findings of this study.

One participant noted that the child's mother was living and working in Johannesburg and that when she fell ill her colleagues brought her back home.

> "*we did not know the father of the child she came back with, all we were told is that she was living (cohabiting) with him in Johannesburg and that when she fell ill he disappeared, I had to look after my sister until she met her death. She never told me who the child's father was; all she said was that she used to live with him in Johannesburg where she was working".*

Another participant stated the following*:*

> *" no the child's late mother and that man were never married; they could never be married because the child's father was a married man from Kwa-Zulu Natal and he had a wife and kids. The child's father came to Ermelo looking for employment when he met the child's late mother bebakipitha (meaning they were cohabiting) I think she knew that he was married when she gave birth to the child. After she passed on the father took off, I don't even think that his family in Kwazulu Natal know about the child he left in Ermelo. I always told her that she should not kipita with this man as this was not good for her at all"*

A statement made by one of the participants regarding ukukipita

"Men *just ditch the women after he has had enough with her without any consequences*. *At least if they are married or if they are lobola'd (paid brides wealth) if the man decided to ditch the women, the families can come together and assist in their relationship, but if they are kipit' ing (cohabiting) then it's difficult to come in and try to fix such a relationship. Men are just using women in such settings.*

4.4 THEME 2: HARDSHIP

4.4.1 Subtheme 1: Financial hardship

The study demonstrated that in some cases even when the children's biological mothers were alive, some fathers did not support their children and that some of the children's biological mothers struggled financially when raising their children because fathers did not comply with maintenance orders. 90 percent of the participants who participated in the study maintained

that they were struggling financially to meet the demands of the children's school needs, clothing and school uniform amongst other things before their children were legally placed in foster care and were in receipt of a Foster care grant. Of those participants who knew the children's fathers before they became absent in their foster children's lives, and before they launched an application for foster care of the children, noted that they were reluctant to claim child support on behalf of the children. Apart from those foster parents who did not know their foster children's fathers even before the placement of their foster children. These foster parents felt that since they did not know their children's fathers' whereabouts even before their children's foster children were placed with them, it would be a worthless process to even try and claim support as the courts would have to trace the fathers which they knew nothing about their whereabouts.

A study by Khunou (2006) established that while some fathers demonstrate their love and affection for their children, irrespective of the status of their relationship with the children's mothers, other fathers do not support their children financially or otherwise. Khunou (2006) also mentioned that some applicants either do not know their rights regarding maintenance or lack knowledge as to how the system is supposed to work. On the other hand Khunou (2006) further states that many critics of the maintenance system justifiable argue that the law still privileges fathers and makes it difficult for mothers to access maintenance for their children.

For 50% of the foster care parents, foster care was applied for as a result of financial challenges with regards to raising the child especially after other means of support failed. Edwards, Borsten, Nene, and Kunene (2007) maintain that financial provision is associated with fatherhood in the study most of the foster parents also associated fatherhood to financial provision, they all noted that because of the children's fathers absence and the lack of financial support which the father was expected to fulfil, all of the foster parents in study noted that they then opted foster care placement. It is said that all the foster children were receiving a Child Support Grant before they were placed in foster care. In South Africa children who are under the age of 18 years old have Social Security provided by the State if they qualify according to the means test (Samson, MacQuene, & van Niekerk, 2006).

Some of the remarks made by the foster parents regarding the financial difficulties are similar to Patrick's study (2006) on the effects of boys experiences on absent fathers. The findings in the study appeared to correspond with existing literature, namely that boy with absent fathers experience difficulties in the areas of financial, emotional, social, cognitive and moral development (Patrick, 2006). A study by the Centre of Social Development in Africa and Sonke Gender Justice undertook a project in 2011 that sought to explore absent fathers' conceptions of fatherhood. The findings in the study revealed that fatherhood was centred predominantly on the idea of a father as a breadwinner, and that difficulties associated with fulfilling this role in South Africa contributes greatly to father absence.

This viewpoints stated by some participants are consistent with the view that children who grow up in single-parent households are likely to experience social and economic disadvantages (Lang & Zagorsky, 2001). However, the economic deprivation in single-parent families is not due to the physical absence of one parent but to the absence of the economic resources generated by the absent parent (Mandara & Murray, 2000), as demonstrated by this citation:

One participant expressed a need for a father's financial support with regards to raising his children. She indicated that:

> *"I never felt a need for the child's father. I have always been able to support my grandchild but now I am financially constrained I think that it would make a difference if he were here to assist me financially. As the child grows so does his needs and demands".*

However, Madhavan, Townsend and Garey (2008) caution that the father's presence in the home should not be regarded as a measure of his financial support to his children, but rather that the father's residence and financial support for his children should be considered as two separate issues of a father's connection to his children.

4.4.2 Subtheme 2: Cultural Hardship

The two participants who believed in cultural traditions also alluded to the fact that they are feeling like they are failing their foster children and are exposing them to misfortune as they are unable to perform rituals for them like other children in their communities and families. Whilst sixteen of the participants felt that praying for the child was sufficient and that the child would be protected through prayer regardless of whether there are cultural rituals performed or not. The other two participants did not have an opinion on the matter, they were just of the view that children grow up whether there are rituals performed for them or not. They felt that it is up to the child to work hard and achieve his or her goals and that his or her life is not destined by the performance of cultural rituals or lack thereof. Some of the participant's views in the study are similar to those of other communities such as Transkei where the community holds strong values and believes about African traditions, during the ritual called "imbeleko" it is the father who provides a name and introduces the child to ancestors. It is believed then that failure to perform the "imbeleko" ritual for the child, the child will be exposed to misfortune which continues throughout his or her entire life (Ramphele & Richter, 2006).

It is arguable that South Africa is a diverse country with diverse families (Koen, Van Eeden & Rothman, 2012) who have diverse cultural beliefs and differences. Each culture has its own beliefs, practices, values and rituals which define the role of the parent within each culture (Gichinga, 2007). Father absence therefore may not mean the same thing across different cultures therefore a child's development is strongly influenced by his or her immediate family, home environment, social environment as well as the culture in which she or he grow up in (Gupta & Theus, 2006).

The different cultures within which the participants raise their foster children in seem to have a great influence on their personal beliefs and practices. A sense of feeling stigmatised and culturally excluded is another one of the many hardships that was evident in the participant's interviews. Prejudice from cultural family members and deep rooted cultural practises in their communities was detected in the response of the participants and it was clear that the foster parents experienced hardship in terms of not being able to perform cultural rituals for the children they foster. For example, Mkhize (as cited in Richter & Morrell, 2006) attests that in most African cultures the birth of a child is traditionally and ceremonially celebrated. It is

further stated that there are many rituals which are performed for a child as the child is born and throughout their entire life.

According to African culture, the paying of damages is seen as an acknowledgement that the father takes responsibilities for the child born out of wedlock. According to the culture, if a father pays for damages then the child is his or her paternal family and they have access to the child. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended acknowledges the cultural practice of paying damages. All of the participants noted that they interpreted the lack of payment for damages to their families by the children's fathers and paternal families as a lack of interest in the child's lives.

For example, all of the participants acknowledge that the paying of damages is a cultural practise that is practised by African families in South Africa and that it is a practise of acknowledging paternity. Whilst all the participants shared the same feeling about the payment of damages their experiences with the children's fathers was different from the social norm as all of them stated that the children's fathers whether known to them at some point before the placement of the children in foster care or not did not pay any damages for the children that they foster.

Some of the participants share the same concern and cultural belief that these rituals are to be performed according to the paternal clan and therefore the absence of a father means that their children may be deprived of such rituals and may be subjected to misfortune which continues for the rest of their lives.

Contrary to the popular belief that most of the participants shared, one of the participants expressed that through her desperation and strong belief in performing cultural rituals for the child she fosters, she had to perform those cultural rituals herself as she was getting tired of being judged by others and pressurised about her failure to perform cultural rituals for the child. The foster parent noted that her foster child was very ill and the doctors would not see what was wrong with the child, she held the belief that the child was continually ill because the child was never introduced to his ancestors and that his ancestors did not know him hence were not protecting him. She stated that she needed to slaughter an animal (goat) and go out into an open veld to call upon the child's ancestors. She noted that this was difficult as she did not know the clan name of the child's paternal or the biological father's surname. She

nonetheless, explains how the ceremony is to take place at the child's paternal family, but that since there is no one from the paternal family she decided to do it in an open veld. She believed that performing the ceremony there would help she stated that she called upon her ancestors to help her connect with the child's' ancestors. She stated that she explained to them that she does not know anything about the child's biological father or his paternal family. She further stated that the pressure to conduct such a ceremony on her own as a women was due to the fact that the child was very ill and that her community would pressurise her into doing so. She stated that some community members who help the same believe of introducing children to their ancestors would tell her of how her foster child would have a dark cloud over his life or even die if she does not introduce him to his ancestors. The participant strongly believed that this ritual would assist her and her foster child.

The participant stated the following:

> *"The child fell ill and I had no choice. I knew that this was because of the fact that we did not introduce her to her paternal ancestors, how could I have done that if I do not know them. Nonetheless I performed some cultural rituals for her since someone had to step in, I went to the veld to perform the rituals, and I only know her father's surname so I called upon my ancestors to help me find the ancestors of her fathers. I did this in the veld because that was a neutral place…I also went to my sisters grave to shout at her for not letting us know who the child's father was and for not introducing him to the family. When I came back from the grave yard and from the veld I found that the child was better, she never fell that sick ever again".*

One statement that was made by the foster parent with regard to the lack of payment of damages was as follow:

> "*The child's father did not pay any damages for his child…and he was never involved in the child's life. He did not perform any cultural rituals for the child; I cannot perform any rituals for him as it is the responsibility of the father or the paternal family to do such. I worry that he has a dark cloud over his head.. He also did not contribute to*

> *the maintenance of the child* even *when he was still present tin the child's life…before he disappeared".*

4.4.3 Subtheme 3: Emotional hardship and lies

"The loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer" (Bowlby, 1998). The loss of a parent through foster care and death is a painful experience for some. Father's absence and the deaths of the children's biological mothers left some participants emotionally wounded. As some of the late mothers of the children were daughters of the foster parents, whilst others were siblings and uncle. Some of these women were assisting their families even financially. One of the participants noted that the child's mother was employed and worked away from home, but that she could deposit money for the child as well as for the family at large. Another participant noted she had a close relationship with the child's late mother and how she was able to share confidential information with her and know that she would not go around telling people of making fun of her. Another participant spoke about the advice that her foster child's late mother would give her and of the emotional support that she offered her. On the contrary, one participant noted that's he did not know the child's late mother although they were related. She stated that's she only knew about her when she had fallen ill and she was one of the only related family members to look after her and her infant child. Nonetheless, the loss of these mothers had detrimental effects on the foster parents especially since they shared some form of common family history, attachment, memories and so forth. As the foster children grew older, the foster parents noted that their foster children would ask them more and more questions about their biological parents. Some foster parents noted that they started fostering the children from very young ages and some were still too young to even remember their biological parents. Therefore one finds that some of these foster parents teach their foster children to call them "mama" and some of them grow up knowing that their foster parents are their mother. Some parents noted that they had to lie to their children about their biological fathers' absenteeism. This was meant as a way of protecting them and making them feel part of the family. Nonetheless some foster parents identified the dangers of not telling their foster children the truth about their birth parents as withholding the truth from them sometimes hurts them more than when they have to find out from strangers or from magistrates' in court proceedings when their placements are being reviewed.

4.4.3.1 Hurt and pain from rejection by fathers

The participants noted that their foster children are affected at some point in their lives about the reality of not knowing their father's whereabouts or identities. The participants noted that seeing their foster children feeling rejected and hurt also hurts them emotionally and knowing that they can never fill the gap of the child's need for a biological father. Some foster parents noted that as their foster children grow they begin to ask emotionally draining questions which they themselves are unable to answer. Those children of younger ages were said to be curious but foster parents were able to brush them off.

In light of this it is arguable then that not only do foster parents experience the hurt and pain but the children themselves also experience such emotions through the loss of a parent. It is further arguable then that the social setting of foster care may interrupt children's developmental stages, and even prevent them from being in a good state of health (Lowenberg, 1995). It is further argued that although the system of foster care has the good intention of keeping children safe, including emotionally, physically and mentally safe and also away from danger, the consequences of doing so have unintentionally increased the vulnerability of this already fragile population (Lowenberg, 1995).

Some of the foster parents noted that their children experienced rejection and betrayal by their unreliable absent fathers. Krohn and Bogan (2001) are of the view that girls with absent fathers grow up without receiving attention, care and loving interaction from a man on a daily basis. Thus, they feel unloved and as such, their emotional wellbeing maybe adversely affected. Studies show that element of trust is important in all kinds of relationships because it is closely related to respect. It is arguable that the impact of father's absence resulted in participants children's lives may result in these children not trusting men.

This argument is consistent with those of the views of those participants in the study by East, Jackson and O'Brien (2007), who experienced difficulties in their relationships with men including having a lack of trust in men among other things. Studies demonstrate that fathers have a greater effect on their daughters' ability to relate and trust other men (Dunleavy, Wanzer, Krezmen, Ruppel, 2011). Therefore the age at which a daughter loses her father is significant, since it has a bearing on her perception of males (Krohn & Bogan, 2001).

Some studies show that children who grow up with absent fathers seem to lack in some aspects of their lives as compared to those who live with their fathers (Davids and Romans, 2013). Researchers further regard father's involvement in the lives of theirs children throughout childhood and adolescence as beneficial for children (Doherty, Koueski, Erickson, 1998). However, from their study MacCallum and Golombok (2004) concluded that not having a father present does not seem to have negative consequences for children. There is also a notion that African-American fathers are also not fully present in their children's lives, since most of them do not live with their children (Thomas & Newton, 2008)

Young further argues that it is important to have platforms whereby foster children's experiences and feelings associated with foster care cans be addressed. On the other hand the participants who partook in the study also noted that they are affected by the emotional hurt which their foster children experience. Another foster parent attributed her lack of trust in men to the abandonment of the foster child experienced

The emotional consequence of fostering a child with an absent living father is accentuated by a heart-breaking response from one of the participants who said that:

"It is heart-breaking to raise a child and have to lie to them about their father, when I took my foster child she was still too young to understand (death) that her mother passed on and abandonment (that her father had disappeared). So she grew up calling me mommy and my boyfriend daddy because she would hear my kids calling us in that way. After a few years when she was older, she started asking me question such as why is my surname not the same as Nobuhle's and Sibusiso's (referring to my older daughter and son). I think she had started hearing rumours from nosey neighbours and family members. I hated lying to her about her father and her mother but most of all I was repelled by her father's actions…I mean how do you just leave your child when their mother had just passed on? Nonetheless I was surprised by her reaction she seemed to be understanding and she is coping well even at school".

Another participant related the following:

> "*I don't think that all men deserve to be fathers, some men are cruel all those absent fathers are hurting their children in so many ways including us who must pick up the broken pieces. It is really tough"*

4.4.4 Subtheme 4: Discipline

19 of the 20 participants noted that they found it difficult to discipline their foster children as they grew older. The participants felt that their children sometimes would accuse them of being bias when they are disciplining them. The foster parents shared a common feeling of being scared to discipline their foster children as they did not want them to feel like they were picking on them because they don't have parents to defend them. This could be due to external influences from other family members or community members, where the child is told that your foster parent mistreats you because you are not her biological child. This could also be due to the child feeling like they different from the other children in the household.

One foster parent noted that she got over this fear after she realised that the child would just misbehave on purpose and expect not to be disciplined for it, the reason for this may be because children are manipulative and may take advantage of the fact they are orphaned or without a biological father.

The second statement preceding the one below highlights the how the participants benefitted from having a social father when it comes to issues of discipline. Nonetheless, Margsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2000) maintain that a father figure should not overshadow the lack of father-daughter connection or father as one can argue the father-son connection. The lack of involvement as explained by Margsiglio et al. (2000) in the development of a daughter, and the non-exiting relationship between daughters and their paternal grandparents and relative impacts negatively on the child's development. Furthermore children end up displaying ill behaviour and they end up not knowing their history in relation to their roots, identities, clan names and totems.

Children may feel like they want sympathy for their situation and therefore be expect to treated differently from other children in the household she stated the following:

> "*I have straightened her up and she knows that I will give her a good spanking if she misbehaves, she also knows that I am not picking on her because she is not my biological child*".

Another foster parent expressed her difficulty in this storyline:

> *"I do not have strength to spank my child (referring to the foster child) so instead I ask men from my family or church to speak to him as a man since he is also too old to get a spanking from me".*

4.5 Theme 3: Support

4.5.1 Subtheme 1: Importance of support

The participants noted that they received support from social systems such as families, community members as well as from social workers. A community is described as "any social, geographical or interest group in which the diversity of the members leads to the development of complex interaction, relationships and processes" (Van der Merwe and Krige, in Duncan, Bowman, Naidoo, Pillay and Ross, 2007 p.296). This definition captures all the communities that were mentioned in the study. Most of the foster parents received support and information from their communities. Some of them noted that they knew about foster care through friends and community members who encouraged them to then seek further support from social workers. Another foster parent reported the following:

> *"After the child's mother passed on, the father also disappeared…I was struggling with the child, some of my neighbours informed me to go to the department of social development to apply for a foster care grant for the child so it would be easier to fulfil the child's needs…so I went and the social workers assisted me…*".

Similar statements were made by the other foster parents. They noted that their communities were supportive in linking them to useful resources. Communities were also emphasised as important because some the decisions that were taken by the foster parents were influenced

by the community responses to their situation. Communities are there to monitors each other's wellbeing and to be supporters in terms of need and to provide assistance in raising children. One of the participants in the study noted that she joined a group of mothers and grandmothers who are currently helping her to make the right choices in raising her foster child, whilst one participant had a negative experience in her community. According to the foster parent, her community did not play any role in supporting her or providing guidance to her with regards to how to go about with applying for a foster care. She noted that some of her community member advised her to give the foster child away to social workers as they felt that it would burden her to raise the child without the support of the father since the father was unknown. However, this participant felt strongly about keeping the child and making ends meet from what she had at her disposal. She noted that she was raised to believe that family is important and that families should support each other. She alluded to the possibility that her foster child may be a gift from God and that one never knows the plans that God has for her and her foster child.

Unlike the findings by Hipgrave (1982) which indicated the lack of support from communities in Briatin and America, community support plays an essential part in the confidence level of these foster parents when caring for their foster children in the South African context. As stated in social work in terms of the systems theory, it is noted that one system cannot function without the other, and the principle of interconnectedness is illustrated quite well in the study (Potgieter, 1998). Community serves as a place where foster parents receive approval, where they are guided and where decisions are made with the comfort of receiving advice and support.

One participant stated the following

"*I also go for meetings in my community for women of all ages who raise orphaned children as well as abandoned children. it is good because they give me good advice"*

4.5.2 Subtheme 2: Extended family members

Of the twenty participants, twelve participants noted that their foster care children were raised by their mothers before their passing on with some assistance and support from their maternal families. In contrast to nineteen participants who noted that they receive support from their

families only one of the twenty participants who was a male participant noted that he has also been raising his foster child under his care since the child was of a tender age. He noted that his relatives were all not available to help him raise the child after his mother passed on.

The findings are consistent with those of Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) that a father is not critical in the life of a child and that such a responsibility can be executed by a responsible adult who provides a stable environment for the child. This was the case in this inquiry, as nineteen participants reflected that their foster children had a father figure in their lives. Although participants maintain that do get support from families, it is difficult to measure and determine the extent and value of support that they in actual fact receive from their families (Maudeni, 2001). Such difficulty can be attributed to what Makomane (2012) refers to as economic and demographic changes which exhaust the traditional means of support that was offered by the extended family. Families also play an integral part in the lives of foster parents as well as their foster children. The families are there to assist foster parents with looking after the children when they are unable to do so or if they have other commitments. Families also look out for their foster children's wellbeing and allow foster parents to take a break from the stresses of parenting now and again.

Reliance of foster mothers on their families for support in raising children is important and prevalent among Africans. The participants' families played a role in assisting them with the upbringing of their foster children.

> *"… after my child passed on I continued raising my grandchild just as I had been raising her since her mother was alive, her uncles and aunts (maternal) would assist me in providing for the child's needs such as school uniform, clothes as well as calculators and stuff."*

One participant noted that she single- handedly raises her grandchild without the support of relatives stating that

> "*I raise my own grandchild [meaning she raises her grandchild who was placed in foster care with her] and I fill both parts [referring to the role of mother and father]."*

The maternal grandmothers and maternal aunts and uncles formed strong teams in raising and caring for their children. It appears that the participants raise their foster children in homes that are stable, nurturing and protective. The findings further confirm Louw's (2013) assertion that, for a long time, child-rearing in South Africa has been characterised by multi-caregivers in the lives of children, such as grandparents and members of the extended family as they shared the same values as illustrated by the following storylines:

> *"Me and my other living children are responsible for my grandchildren's upbringing. I* [maternal grandmother] *make sure that they go to school daily and always communicate with them about what they need at that time, I also ask for assistance from my own children who will then make sure that they provide for us where they can. When their mother was still alive, I was still active in my grandchildren's lives and I* [maternal grandmother] *shared the same values with their mother and always agreed on a way of bringing them up although she would think that I spoil them sometimes (smiling…)*."

> *"From birth till when she started going to grade 3, I was living with my grandchildren ... and their mother worked outside of town she [mother] would come around every fourth night to visit them . My grandchildren never liked going to the city to visit their mother so they spent most of their holidays with me*."

"Their *mother used to live with me in the same house; she was never married when she gave birth to the child, so the child has always been in our house".*

4.6 THEME 4: IDENTITY

Even though most of the participants noted that their children can identify themselves with their current families, and are well adjusted to the families, personal identity and a lack of a sense of belonging remain challenges for some of their foster children. 12 of the 20 participants noted that their foster children carry a huge burden of resentment and emotional scars as a result of deep-rooted unanswered questions about their absent fathers. This deep rooted resentment is about not knowing ones full identity, not knowing ones surname and feeling like one doesn't not belong in the foster family. One participant highlights that the

knowledge of one's family history and health risks are important, a matter that seems to be ignored by many as reflected in her storyline:

> *"There was a time when I would take my foster child to the clinics and doctors and I would be asked about her family history. I needed to know about my child's family history so I can make sense about her character and personality. I also needed to know about her medical background so I could know what kind of idleness that the child is genetically predisposed to".*

The findings corroborate with that of East et al. (2007) whose participants expressed the lack of shared histories with their fathers. This could be a major challenge amongst many Africans who believe that a child, who has not been formally introduced to his or her father's family or ancestors, is likely to experience mishaps throughout his or her entire life.

The below mentioned statements supports Ngobeni's (2006) statement about the important role that women play in raising and teaching their sons to become responsible men. In a study of the experiences of a group of young fathers in Cape Town and Durban, it was established that young fathers face multiple challenges in being involved in the lives of their children (Swarts & Bhana, 2009). Nonetheless, the study highlights the desires of young men to be involved in parenting their children and raises awareness of the stumbling blocks presented by cultural traditions, their families and the family of their child's mother. Like in the statement above, money seems to be equated to with responsibility, for example, that the young men's involvement in a child's life is compensated for with the payment of damages and that the dominating view is being able to provide financial support for your child

Clearly, the assertion by Krohn and Bogan (2001) that meaning and interaction with men cannot be learned from biological fathers alone holds true, as participants children have learned from their social fathers such as their uncles, brothers, grandfathers as well as other men in the community who take on the fatherly role.

The participants who foster children whose fathers are not only absent but are also unknown to them noted that some of the experiences that they experience with raising such children is that they do not know the heritage of the children. If the foster parents are lucky to know the

child's fathers surname and some history with regards to the father, they are able to then determine the possible cultural clan that the child belongs to, however this is not always a straight forward process as other cultural clans share the similar surnames. Richter and Morrell (2006) suggest that surnames give individuals a sense of belonging and identifications. It symbolises the child's history and sense of self. Another one of the foster parent's reported the following:

In contrast to the participants who noted that they believe that their foster children's identity lies in their paternal surnames, other participants in the study acknowledged that giving their children their maternal surnames gives them a sense of identity and that of belonging. They noted that they found that their children found solace in knowing about their maternal history and heritage than not knowing at all. Some foster parents shared that view that they teach their foster children to take pride in their maternal surnames which most of their foster children are using. Whilst other children found comfort in using their maternal surnames, some foster parents asserted that they experienced changes in their foster children's acceptance of using their maternal surnames as they grew into the adolescence stage. It seems that the children started growing curious and were full of questions and quests to discover their biological fathers or their paternal families. These children's behaviours confirm what research suggests that some children who grow up without their biological fathers seek to know them during adolescence.

Erikson notes that the adolescent stage is one of the stages of the five psychosocial stages of development. This stage is normally referred to as the "Identity versus Confusion stage" it is a stage whereby a teenager is faced with the task of identifying himself or herself. It is a stage that is characterised by a lot of curiosity and deep-rooted questions about oneself. It is a stage of self-discovery and finding out ones individuality and identity. Therefore, like other teenagers, these foster parents have experienced their foster teenagers go through the same phase of wanting to know about who they are. As indicated in their storylines, part of knowing about who they are is discovering their absent living fathers and an attempt of changing their maternal surnames to their paternal surnames I search of discovering their identities'.

These are some of the statements made by foster parents, where it is demonstrated that raising a child without a father had become a source of strength and opportunity for one of the male participants who said:

> *"I was angry at that man who deserted his child and never took responsibility for his actions. I want to do better for my children because I have seen how being abandoned by your father can tear one apart. I want my children to know me I believe that a father has a significant role to play in a child's life".*

Another participant indicated a positive response of being committed to promoting relationships between children and their fathers. She is on a mission in her church to raise awareness and educate young men about the significant role that fathers play in the lives of their children as encapsulated below:

> *"In church I encourage the young men not to have sexual relations with girls, but you know how young people are, nonetheless I also encourage those young men who have children not to abandon their children. I tell them to take responsibility for their children and be supportive fathers not only financially. They love their children and others feel like they cannot provide real support if they are unemployed".*

Essentially, aspects of fathering related to "moral and ethical socialisation and transitions to independence and autonomy" (Richter, 2006. p.58) were provided by maternal uncles who played a significant role in the lives of the participants foster children by instilling a sense of worth in them as evinced by the response that:

> *"My sons help me to raise my foster child. Some of the men from church and my community also give them some direction".*

"The child cannot know his identity if he does not know his surname, he cannot be initiated because we do not know his cultural practices…how can we call upon the ancestors when we do not know which ones to call upon".

4.6.1 Circumstances that lead to foster care placement

Most of the foster parents who ended up taking the decision to be foster parents had little or no choice with regards to fostering the children that they are fostering. Foster care seemed to be one of the only options that they had after the deaths of the children's biological mothers and the absence of their biological fathers. Some noted that they were only family members who took an interest in the children's wellbeing or the only responsible family members. Some noted that it was the their families decisions for them to foster the children whilst others maintained that they had already been living with the children even before their mothers passed on so the process of foster care was just to legalise the children's stay with them. Therefore they already had long standing relationships with the children even before the foster placements. Bruskas (2008) notes that 542,000 children are placed in foster care nationally. The study further revealed that a large percentage of these children have previous backgrounds of mistreatment such as experiencing abuse and neglect. Neglect was said to be one of the common forms of maltreatment and popular reason for why many children require foster care placements (Bruskas, 2008).

Most of the foster parents that were interviewed stated that the children's fathers disappeared from their children's lives even before the children were born. Most of the foster parents noted that most the children's fathers were never involved in the children's lives during their mother's pregnancy and even after giving birth, although some knew about the pregnancy they would still choose to be absent from their children's lives. One of the participants however, responded that she knew the reasons why the child's father refused to be a part of the child's live. She stated the following:

> "*The child's father was a married man and when he found out that he had gotten my daughter pregnant, he denied the pregnancy and refused to take responsibility for the child…he denied taking responsibility for the child for the sake of not losing his wife and children, so after the death of my daughter (the child's mother) the child had to be raised by me since he was unwelcomed in his father's family."*

Circumstances that lead to fostering children varied from each participant. The foster parents noted that their decision to foster was influenced by the fact that the children's fathers were

not involved in the children's lives before and even after the deaths of their biological mothers. Whilst 50% of the participants maintained that they have seen the children's fathers from photographs or physically, another 50% of the participants noted that they never knew them. Figure 4.2 depicts that 50% of the participants do know about the children's fathers although they are absent from the children's lives whilst 20% of the participants noted that they do not know the children's fathers and 30% of the participants noted that they only knew the children's fathers from photographs.

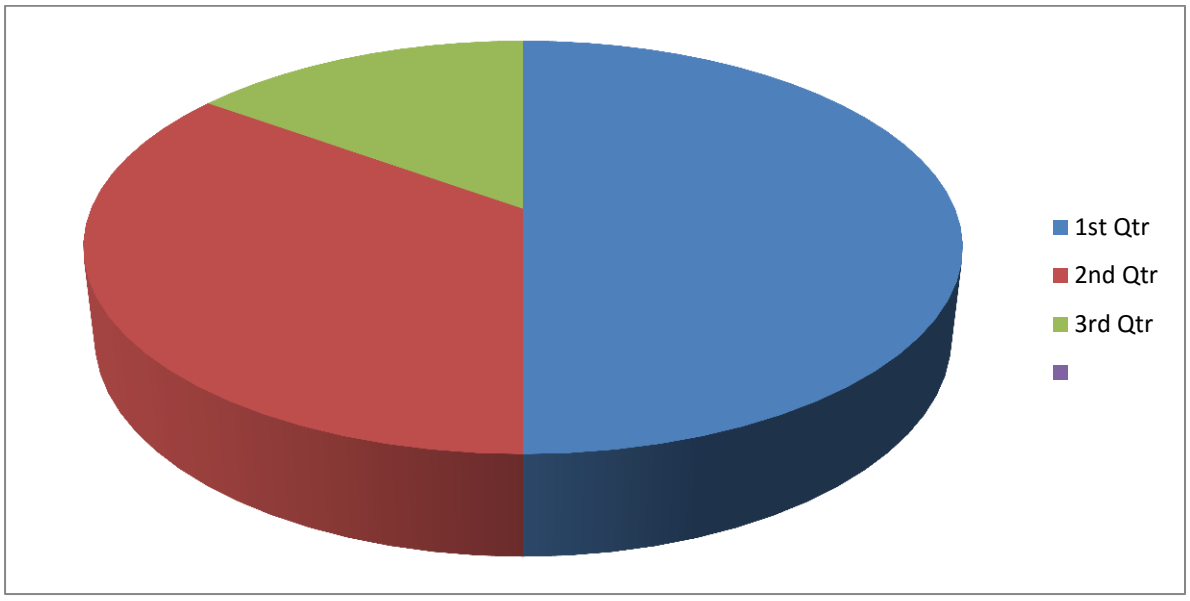


Figure 4.2: Father absence in children's lives (N=20)

There may be many factors which led these foster parents to foster their late sisters and daughter's children, it is however also important to remember they were not forced into doing so. Giddens (2008) argues that individuals are not completely free agents, but that they do act with some freedom of choice. This assertion suggests that human beings exist within social structures which simultaneously constrain and enable action however opportunities for agency always exist. Therefore these foster parents still had the choice not to foster these children but send them to children's homes or look for alternative care.

4.7 THEME 5: PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF ABSENT FATHERS

Participants identified a number of consequences for children that they perceived as being caused by their father's absence which included lack of educational progress, risky sexual behaviour and uncontrollable behaviour.

4.7.1 Subtheme 1: Poor Educational Performance

The family is notable the first socialising agent the child comes into contact with. It has a great impact on the child's physical, mental and moral growth. The family lays the basis of education before the child actually goes to school and the personality that the child will take to school is highly determined by his or her home (Maduewesi & Emenogu, 1997). Both the parents at home have a pivotal role to play in their child's education. The father is perceived as a provider of the needed tools for educational advancement and the mother is expected to support the father's effort in this regard. When the father is absent and the mother is not fortunate enough to provide for the basic needs as well as supervise the academic performance of the child, the child may be backward or withdrawn (Uchenna, 2013).

It is arguable then that a single parent like many of the participants who foster these children are faced with doubled responsibilities requiring time, attention and money of the foster parents. Therefore like many of the foster parents stated that less attention is paid to the psychological and educational wellbeing of their foster children. It is therefore clear that children from single-parent home do face some challenges including the strong link between the absence of a father and the increasing level of teenage pregnancy and crime. Research has shown that children from single-parent homes exhibit anti-social behaviour and tend to perform badly in terms of their school work (Uchenna, 2013).

Most of the foster parents associated that the bad school performance of their foster children to father absence. One of the participants reported the following:

> *"My foster child is performing badly at school, he is slow, and he fails…he needs his father to perform cultural rituals that's why he is failing".*

Similarly to this statement a research by Patrick (2006) showed that boy children are affected negatively with regards to their social relational and academic performance due to the absence of a father. Another participant stated the following:

> *"The absence of the child's father affects the child at home, at school even when he is playing with his friends…you know how children are, they talk about their fathers when they play".*

Bruskas (2008) argues that children in foster care face many educational obstacles because of the frequent moves from one foster placement to another. Therefore, this already vulnerable group becomes more vulnerable educationally (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004). They may miss out on school days while in transition from one home to the next and in addition facing the challenges of new schools which may affect their attendance and comfort, which may negatively impact on their academic outcomes. Holborn and Eddy (2011) note that research in South Africa and elsewhere suggest a strong link between educational success and growing up in a stable family setting where both parents are present and play a role in support the child. Another study that was conducted in South Africa and published in the Journal Adolescence in (1999) found that high school learners who were living with their fathers on average scored higher on scholastic achievement test in all subjects than pupils with absent fathers. Holborn and Eddy (2011) further ascertain that American research has also found that children who grow up with absent fathers experience poor education, anti-social behaviour as well as delinquency. According to the London based Social Policy Justice group, children not brought up by both parents in the United Kingdom are 80% more likely than others to experience educational failure, and nearly 40% more likely to be unemployed or living on state support later in life (Holbron & Eddy, 2011).

While it is therefore arguable that children with parents who provide emotional and practical support, help with homework and assist them with subject choices as well as assist them in choosing careers are more likely to succeed better at school. One can assume that fractured families may therefore play a role in the educational outcomes of South Africa's youth (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). On the contrary, the results proffered by a study by Uchenna (2013) demonstrate the opposite. The results from the study demonstrated that despite that economic hardship, mothers tended to more likely stay in touch with their children's teachers and

participated in the school's activities which are factors that can enhance the academic performance of their children.

This seems to be true as one of the participants noted that when she got concerned about her foster child's poor academic performances, she then consulted with the child's teachers and she discussed her concerns. She noted that being in close contact with her foster child's educator has helped her monitor the child's academic performance and that she has seen and improvement in her grades. In assertion of the statement made by the participant below, a study by Makofane (2015) demonstrated that the participants who were interviewed in the study who grew up with absent living fathers were not affected poorly in terms of their academic performances as many studies would like to suggest. The findings demonstrated that those participants who grew up in father absent homes turned out to be successful and professional individuals. The following was stated the following:

> *"She is not a lazy child, she comes home after school and does her homework, I can't assist her with it because I myself am not educated…but she kept failing and had to repeat her grade 8. I got concerned about her poor performance so I started getting involved in her school and consulting with her teacher who referred her to some extra classes…I must say she is doing much better now".*

4.7.2 Subtheme 2: Sexual promiscuity, criminal activity and anger

The absence of a parent when growing up can have a significant effect on one's attitude towards sex relationships. Studies found that girls who grow up with their fathers present in their lives are more likely to have a higher self-esteem, lower levels of sexual risk behaviour and fewer difficulties in forming and sustaining romantic relationships in life as compared to girls who grow up with absent living fathers (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Similarly to this believe, the foster parents who foster female children noted that some of their children seem to exhibit sexual promiscuity and seem to seek attention from older men, whilst their male children seemed to demonstrate a sense of resentment and anger towards men. Some of them even resorted to criminal activities at some point in their lives and were referred to probation services since they were below age.

Research has shown that the family plays an important role in socialising young people, and children who come from broken families or families which are dysfunctional in one way or another are more likely to themselves continue the pattern of crime, violence or abandonment if such behaviour is learned from home. However, Morrell and Jewkes (2011) argue, however that some boys are brought up to care and remain tied to their families because they have received affectionate care, been socialised to understand men's roles in an alternative sense or chosen to take on the role of being a father, looking after their siblings, parents and or grandparents-regardless of the fact that they themselves have been abandoned by their fathers. Some foster parent's attested to this by stating that their male foster children are responsible and one participant noted the following in her storyline about how proud she is of her grandson.

> *"Unlike many boys in my community, who smoke nayoape and drop out of school, my child (refereeing to her foster grandchild) works over the weekends and he makes extra pocket money. Sometimes he even buys us food in the house and buys his own cloths. He has learnt to be a provider; he will be a good father to his own children".*

Indeed the statement by Richter and Morrell (2006) holds true that the idea about fatherhood is critical in South Africa, fatherhood is most often equated with being a provider. In correspondence to the popular believe that female children who grow up with absent fathers tend to be promiscuous, most of the foster parents who raise girl foster children alluded to the fact that they suspect that their children tend to have many sexual partners.

One participants stated the following:

> *"I am very scared for this child, it seems like she likes boys. She comes home with late and sometimes never spends the nights at home. So I took her to the social workers to have a talk with her and tell her of the dangers of sleeping with men, I also took her to the clinic to get contraceptives because she told me that she does not uses a condom every time she sleeps with her boyfriends*" .

A study that was published by the South African Race Relations in the year 2011 states that the number of teenagers falling pregnant in South Africa is high. It is further argued that the high numbers of young people falling pregnant indicates that young people engage in unprotected sex which has a bearing on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is said that the incidence of HIV is much higher among 15-24 year old women than men which is 12.7% compared to 4.0%. It was further stated that some 70% women who were aged between 18-35 years old who had never had children said that their pregnancies were unplanned.

In contrast to these findings a study that was conducted (Makofane 2015) indicated that the female participant's in the study that grew up with absent living fathers did not resort to sexual promiscuity as many studies suggest.

4.8 DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to gain insight into the experiences of African foster care parents who are raising children with absent living fathers. Overall the participants shared a balanced account of their experiences of being foster care parents with children of absent living fathers. The findings revealed that, firstly that their parents were cohabiting during and after their births and that all the children whom the participants foster were born out of wedlock and only a few of their fathers were present for the first few years of their lives. Although the participants who were mostly maternal grandparents and maternal relatives reported that they tried by all means to raise the children in a loving and supportive family, they also highlighted some of the hardships which they come across which included emotional hardship, financial hardship, cultural hardship, emotional hardship as well as issues of discipline. Secondly, eighteen participants noted that they had a form of a social father who was present in their children's lives namely their maternal grandfathers. Uncles and other men from their communities such as male church members, thus they were relived from the burden not having a father-figure throughout their foster children's development. The participants found the social fathers to be beneficial in providing and attending to the economic as well as school needs for their foster children except for one foster parent who noted that she did not receive any form of support from her relatives in raising her foster child because of the strains in her family. Thirdly, none of the participants received any assistance from their foster children's paternal families. Even though none of the participants received assistance from their foster children's paternal families and sometimes felt overwhelmed by

the stresses of parenting a child without a father, they were able to provide for the basic needs of their children and sought alternative help from their extended families and social workers.

Fourthly, whilst the issue of identity seemed to concern most of the participants, they were able to find solace and some form of comfort in using their own maternal surnames as a form of creating and fostering a sense of belonging and that of identity for their foster children. The participants identified the various contributing factors which led them to opting to foster their foster children, which included amongst other things the deaths of the children's mothers and the absence of their fathers. The majority of the participants felt an obligation to look after their foster children as they felt that they were their responsibilities since their, mothers were no more and their fathers had been absent, untraceable or their whereabouts unknown. Fifthly, the participants indicated their own perceptions of how absent fathers impacted on their foster children's lives which were poor educational performances, sexual promiscuity, and behavioural problems which were exhibited by their foster children. All of which added to their experiences of fostering children with absent fathers.

Furthermore, the burden carried by maternal relatives in caring for children with absent fathers is a major challenge and concern. Therefore, fathers should be encouraged to accept paternity and father their children. Thus, a brief discussion and the implications for social work practise is presented in the following chapter.

The following chapter discusses the main findings of the study, conclusions as well as recommendations which are made following the study.

CHAPTER 5
MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a summary of the main findings in respect of the foster parents' views and experiences are given. Conclusions are made and recommendations are made based on the main findings of the study. To conclude this chapter, recommendations were made on the main findings and conclusions.

5.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings are presented in terms of the aim and objectives identified at the beginning of this report.

5.2.1 To explore the experiences of foster parents who are raising African children who are in foster care as a result of absent fathers.

The participants in the study were all related to the late mothers of their foster children, hence all of them formed part of the maternal family. These participants constituted of maternal family members ranging from grandparents, aunts and uncle. As a result, the study revealed that 90% of the participants were affected negatively and experienced a sense of loss when their foster children's biological mothers passed on. This mainly due to the fact that these late mothers of the children were support pillars in their families and some of them also contributed financially towards the household needs. The study also revealed the difficulties that foster parents experience when their foster children go through the feelings of rejection which are caused by their absent fathers and the pain of the loss of their biological mothers to death.

The findings also pointed out to how cohabitation outside of marriage (ukukipith) was perceived as unacceptable and wrong. The findings pointed to the fact that participants generally felt that cohabiting was an enabling factor for father absence. The findings demonstrated how these informal living arrangements had a bad influence in the family life, such set ups were perceived by the participants to be some of the causes why fathers

disappear from their children. Unlike marriage where the process of divorce is normally long and may involve other family members to assist the couple with family preservation before splitting, the participants believed that (men or women) easily walk in and out of cohabitation as there are no obligations and little attention is paid to the consequences that this may have on family life and children. Children who are born to weeded parents were perceived to have more stable homes and less chances of their fathers being absent from their lives.

5.2.2 To establish the socio-cultural implications of raising African children who are placed in foster care as a result of absent fathers.

Participants in the study varied according to their perceived social-cultural implications of raising African children who are place in foster care as a result of absent fathers. The study revealed that there was a general consensus with regards to the performances of cultural rituals and traditions for foster children. The participant's believes nonetheless varied in terms of their perceived consequences of performing such cultural rituals or not. Whilst the findings of the study demonstrated that two participants believed that their foster children would face misfortune and bad luck if they do not perform cultural rituals for them to introduce them to their ancestors, sixteen of the participants in the study held a different belief. They believed that prayer was a sufficient tool to use to protect their children from any harm, therefore did not find a need to perform any cultural rituals for their foster children. The findings in the study pointed out that two participants in the study did not believe in cultural rituals and prayer but they were just of the opinion that their foster children will grow and face challenges in life but these would not necessarily be related to the none performance of cultural rituals for them.

The findings revealed that foster parents who wished to perform some form of cultural rituals for their children were unable to do so also because about 50% of the participants in the study do not know the child's fathers as a result they do not know the child's surnames and they are unable to perform cultural rituals for them. One of foster parents noted that she even had to perform cultural rituals for her child alone without the involvement of the paternal family or biological father of the child. The foster parents indicated that according to the African culture, the surname is important in that without his or her father's surname the child has no

identity or a sense of belonging. It was indicated that it is socially undesirable in the African culture for a child to use his or her mother's surname. It is rather honourable that the child uses his father's surname even if the child's father is not present in the child's life.

5.2.3 To investigate whether father absence is something that is talked about in foster families.

Findings in the study alluded to the fact that father absence is not a topic that the foster parents encourage their foster children to talk about. The findings suggest that foster parents would rather prefer that their foster children would initiate the topic of their absent fathers rather than them. 50 % of the participants noted that they never knew the children's biological father's whilst the other 50% noted that they have seen the children's fathers some in person and some photos.

It seems that the participants try by all means to protect their foster children including sometimes deceiving them or making them to believe that they are their biological mothers and that their partners and boyfriend are their fathers. However the findings pointed out to the fact that as their foster children grow it becomes difficult to lie to them as they start hearing stories from mother people about their absent fathers.

5.2.4 To explore some of the challenges that foster parents are faced with when raising a child whose father is absent.

The study revealed emotional hardships, cultural hardships, as well as financial hardships as some of the many challenges that they face when raising their foster children. All the foster parents seemed to be emotional when speaking about their challenges with regards to raising the children. The foster parents felt that fostering the children was their responsibility after the deaths of their mothers and they felt like they had no choice in the matter. The findings showed that whilst most of the foster parents do acknowledge the importance of a father in a child's life, some of them felt that they did not see the need to look or seek for the children's fathers most of whom left the children's mother deliberately even after they had discovered about their pregnancies. 0ne of the foster parents was emotional about the fact that her foster child did not have a father figure in his life and that he does not get proper guidance from a male figure that he look up to. The findings further showed that most of the foster parents

experienced discomfort in fostering children with absent fathers as they did not know how to initiate and discipline them according to their cultural background.

Discipline is another challenge that was found to be common amongst the foster parents. The foster parents noted that the children accuse them of abuse and discrimination when they discipline them. The findings showed that most of the foster children would feel like their foster parents are treating them in unfair manner when they instil discipline in them. It is said that comparison also becomes a big challenge that foster parents face when raising their own children as well as foster children.

Another challenge that was pointed out in the study was that of disclosing to the child about their unknown or absent father. Most foster parents experienced difficulties in telling the children how they ended up in foster care. The most pointed out difficulty was that even they did not know about how to inform the children that their fathers knew about them and still remained absent from their lives.

Most of the foster parent noted that applying for the foster care grant was one of the opportunities that they experienced as most of them reported that they were also financially challenged. Therefore, as little as the foster care grant is in comparison to the children's needs, the foster parent maintained that they were nevertheless grateful that the grant is able to meet some of the children's needs and save for them at the same time.

5.2.5 To explore the support systems that foster parents have in raising foster children with absent fathers.

The findings demonstrated that most of the foster parent who took part in the study noted that support was sourced from family members, communities and social workers. Nonetheless, the findings further revealed that although the foster parents received little support from family members with regards to financial contributions to raising the children whom they foster, they still provides other forms of support, such as moral support and social support which comes a long way when raising such children in foster care.

Social workers were also found to be another support system for the foster parents and children. It was found that the majority of foster parents would report to the social workers whenever they had issues in their foster relations.

5.3 RECOMMENDATION

5.3.1 To the prospective researchers

- Similar studies should be conducted with other groups in South Africa to explore various experiences of foster parents with different races.
- It would be important to conduct research with absent living fathers themselves and explore their reasons and choices for being absent in their children's lives.
- Studies should also be done to with foster children whereby their experiences of living with absent fathers are explored.

5.3.2 The social workers

- Developing and implementing programmes to support foster parents who are raising foster children with absent living fathers.
- Developing and maintaining support groups for foster parents who are raising children with absent fathers.
- Developing men's groups whereby foster children can have male role models and father figures that can groom them through manhood.

5.3.3 To Government and NGO's

- Governments should encourage media programmes to show the importance of a father in a child's life so as to encourage father presence also to demonstrate that fathers are not only needed as financial providers but that responsible fathers are needed for the holistic growth of the child.
- Governments should also ensure that legislations and acts that are pertaining to fathers' rights to their children are not stringent and repelling, therefore denying

fathers to fight for custody rights. As well as for foster parents to be able to do the same.

5.4 CONCLUDING COMMENT

The South African family requires attention, considering that the fathers of all 20 participants had not been involved in their foster children's lives. This phenomenon has impacted on how foster parents raise their foster children. The ripple effect of the fathers' failure to be present in their children's lives and maintain their children will increase the number of children depending on social assistance such as foster care, which will place a strain on the country's resources.

Because of the limited nature of this study, it is recommended that studies should be conducted in the following areas: a comprehensive (including all race groups) exploration and description of the experiences of children growing up in foster homes who have been brought up in families with absent fathers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

An Exploration of Experiences of Foster Parents Raising African Foster Children with Absent Fathers

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

Good day,

My name is Vuyisile Khaba and I am a Masters student registered for the degree Masters Degree in Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on the impact of father absence on the lives of African children in Foster Care. It is hoped that this information may enhance Social Workers' objectivity in service rendering to children who are being brought up with absent fathers.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. Participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in anyway. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will last approximately one hour. You may withdraw from the study at any time and you may also refuse to answer any questions that will make you feel uncomfortable with answering.

Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final report. You will not be identified through your responses. As the interview will include sensitive issues, there is the possibility that you may experience some feelings of emotional distress. Should you therefore feel the need for supportive counselling following the interview, I have arranged for this service to be provided

free of charge by Department of Social Development in the sub-district office of Msukaligwa. They may be contacted on at: 017 811 6646/2108

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on tell: 073 203 8204. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study, an abstract will be made available on request.

Thank You for taking your time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely:

Vuyisile Khaba

RESEARCHER

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

An Exploration of Experiences of Foster Parents Raising African Foster Children with Absent Fathers

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

I hereby confirm that:

I have been briefed on the research that Vuyisile Khaba is conducting on father absence.

- I understand what participation in this research project means,
- I understand that participation is voluntary,
- I understand that I have the right not to answer any question that I do not feel comfortable with,
- I understand that I have the right withdraw my participation in the research, at any time I so chooses and
- I understand that any information that I shares will be held in the strictest confidence by the researcher.

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR TAPE RECORDING IN THE STUDY

CONSENT FORM FOR TAPE RECORDING IN THE STUDY

I hereby consent to tape recording of the interview; I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained at all times. I understand that tapes will be destroyed in two years after any publications arising from the study and six years after completion of this study if there is no publication.

Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D:

Re: Request for permission in using foster care children as research participants in a study of father absence

The Head of Department

My name is Vuyisile Khaba and I am a Masters student registered for the degree Masters Degree in Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I will be conducting research on impact of father absence on the lives of African children in Foster Care. It is hoped that this information may enhance Social Workers' objectivity in service rendering to children who are being brought up in foster care with absent fathers.

I therefore wish to interview foster care children whose fathers are unknown and absent from their lives as my research participants in my study. Ethics clearance for the study will be sought from the University of the Witwatersrand Non-Medical Ethics Committee. Participation will be entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will be acceptable. If foster children's foster parents give assent to the participation, I shall arrange to interview them at a time and place that is convenient for them individually. The interview will last approximately one hour.

Foster children will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time and may also refuse to answer any questions that will make them feel uncomfortable with answering. Furthermore the foster children's personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final report.

It is hoped that this request will be favourably considered. Yours sincerely

_____	_____
Vuyisile Khaba	Motlalepule Nathane-Taulela
RESEARCHER	SOCIAL WORK LECTURER

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

An Exploration of Experiences of Foster Parents Raising African Foster Children with Absent Fathers

Interview schedule

1. SECTION A

Gender:

Male	Female	Other

Age:

25-35 years old	36-45 years old	46-55 years old	56-65 years old	Other

Number of years in Foster Care relationship:

Level of Education

Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Other

Related or non-related foster care placement:

Number of children placed in foster care with you:

Number of family constituents including the foster child:

2. SECTION B

2.1 Tell me more about the circumstances that led to the child(ren) being placed with you

2.2 Do you know the child(rens) biological father? Do you know if the child ever had a relationship with his/her father and his/her paternal family?

3.

3.1 Would you please share your experiences of raising child(ren) whose father is absent?

3.2 Does the child(ren) ask you any questions about his/her father and how do you respond to those questions?

Is there anyone playing the father figure role in the child's life

3.3 In your view has the absence of a father affected a child in any way

4.

4.1 Do you believe in the importance of cultural rituals? If so how are these rituals performed for the child(ren)?

4.2 What are some of the social, cultural and psychological impacts that you and the child experience because of father absence?

APPENDIX F: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SUB-DISTRICT OFFICE

MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT



Department of Social Development

Litiko Lokuthuthukiswa Kwesive UmNyango WezokuThuthukiswa KomPhakathi Departemente van Maatskaplike Ontwikkeling

Enquiries: Mr T.A. Madingoane

Dear Ms Khaba

This letter serves to inform you that your request to conduct a study with foster parents who are raising African children in foster care with absent fathers in the Msukaligwa Sub district office has been received and permission is granted to you to conduct your study using foster parents in from the database. You are expected abide to the following considerations.

Voluntary Participation

No Harm to participants

No bribing of participants

Respect for participants

Clear description of what your study entails

Informed consent

I hope that you will find this in order and all the best with your study.

_____

Department of Social Development

Mpumalanga Msukaligwa Sub-District Office Manger

APPENDIX G: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Khaba

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER H13/06/14**
PROJECT TITLE	Father's whereabouts unknown; the experiences of foster care parents who are raising children of absent fathers
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms V Khaba
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human & Community Development/Social Work
DATE CONSIDERED	21/06/2013
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	11/08/2015

DATE 12/08/2013 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor T Milani)

cc: Supervisor : Ms MS Nathane-Taulela

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10003, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ _____/_____/_____

Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES