THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULTS RAISED IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN THE RAYMOND MHLABA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis which is submitted for the degree Master of Social Work at the University of Fort Hare is my own original work, that it has not been submitted to any other institution and that all of the sources which have been consulted or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of references and are presented in the reference section.
DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Roseline, my brother, Royale, my husband, William, my baby, Wenyasha Loreto, my uncle, Cuthbert, and to all single mothers.
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ABSTRACT

Although the single-parent family is becoming an increasingly common family structure, it is associated with a great many hardships. Owing to the heavy responsibilities which fall on single parents, most fail to meet all of the needs of their children, particularly with respect to the financial needs which are entailed by providing educational necessities, safe, stable and permanent accommodation, adequate food and nutrition and healthcare.

This study adopted the parental loss perspective, the economic hardship perspective and the interparental conflict perspective in investigating the experiences of young adults who were raised in single-parent families. A qualitative approach was adopted to conduct the research and data was collected from 26 male and female participants between the ages of 22 and 39 years who resided within the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality. The researcher sought permission to conduct this study from all the community leaders including the councillors and chiefs, thereby acquiring the first referrals. The study made use of purposive sampling and snowballing to select the research sample. The data was collected by using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and analysed through the use of thematic analysis.

The principal findings of the study indicate that although children who are raised in single-parent homes can attain high levels of education and have solid functional relationships in later life, a lack of finance and active parental involvement in their educational activities and social lives can serve to limit their development. As single-mother households face more economic hardships than any other family structures, financial assistance from both the government and their communities would undoubtedly increase the likelihood of children in single-mother families attaining their true academic potential. In addition, free counselling services would also help children who are forced to live under these circumstances overcome the emotional burden which inevitably accompanies either losing or being separated from one parent.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Families throughout the world are undergoing profound changes, some of which have contributed significantly towards the phenomenon of single parenting. Children being born to young unmarried mothers, separation and divorce among parents and the death of a spouse constitute some of the chief factors which contribute to increased incidences of single parenting. Many studies have been conducted concerning the plight of children from “broken” homes and most of the findings have indicated that children raised in single-parent families tend to exhibit a number of negative behaviours. Both past and recent research suggest that single-parent families are often characterised as being fragmented and contributing to a significant degree to misconduct and delinquency, low levels of educational achievement, a tendency to drop out of school, negative social relationships, low self-esteem, sexual promiscuity and dependence on welfare (Barber and Eccles, 1992).

Stable families usually promote healthy relationships thereby promoting the healthy development of children, whose lives are influenced both by the number of parents and siblings with whom they live and by whether or not their parents are married (Casey, 2013). In recent years, rates of divorce and childbirth out of wedlock have risen precipitously (Ventura, 2009). Unmarried women accounted for 22 percent of all births in 1985, which had almost doubled to 41 percent in 2009 (Browning, Chiappori and Weiss, 2011). This changing pattern has resulted in children growing up in a variety of family structures, particularly in single-parent families. Over the past four decades there has been a dramatic increase in incidences of divorce and unmarried childbearing in the Americas, Europe, Oceania and other parts of the world. It has been suggested that marriage is becoming more of an option for adults, rather than a necessity for the survival of adults and children (Casey, 2013).
According to Brown (2010), children whose parents are not married are prone to experience instability and are usually less likely than children whose parents are married to excel in many areas of life, from social behaviour to academic performance. Osborne, Berger and Magnuson (2012) maintain that children who grow up without one or both parents in their households are at risk with respect to a host of negative consequences for their educational progress of levels of achievement. According to Fomby and Cherlin (2007), children and their parents form a functioning family system and repeated disruption of this system may be distressing to such an extent that children who experience multiple transitions in the structure of their families may experience great difficulties in terms of their development and their ability to adjust, which could severely undermine their sense of security, their ability to trust and their emotional development. However, it needs to be added that not all children who are raised in single-parent families suffer these types of adverse consequences: the risks are simply greater for them.

More than 7 million South African children, approximately 39 percent, live in single-mother households and 4 percent live in single-father households (Berry, Biersteker, Dawes, Lake, and Smith, 2013). Ever-increasing numbers of children are growing up with absent fathers, absent mothers and in single-parent households, as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, among other reasons (Holborn and Eddy, 2011). Children growing up with one parent or without their fathers are at a significant disadvantage and poverty aggravates the effects of the breakdown of their families for children (Holborn and Eddy, 2011).

According to Statistics South Africa (2011), South Africa has a high incidence of absent fathers. Bhana and Nkani (2014) explain that the reasons for this phenomenon include migrant labour, delayed marriage, educational opportunities, gender-based violence and increasing female autonomy. According to Holborn and Eddy (2011), research which was conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) suggests that as the presence of a father can contribute to cognitive development, intellectual functioning and achievement at school, young people who grow
up without fathers are more likely to experience emotional disturbances and depression and to display anti-social forms of behaviour than their counterparts who are raised in stable families.

The reasons for mothers to be absent from the lives of their children usually concern death, divorce, separation, migrant labour or neglecting of children. Breivik and Olweus (2006) contend that adolescent males who are raised in the absence of their mothers are at a higher risk of exhibiting externalised behavioural problems such as anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, committing crimes and joining gangs. It has been suggested that in these instances, the absence of a mother may cause individual children to become emotionally stunted or even autistic.

Swartz, Bhana, Richter and Versfeld, (2013) maintain that the absence of a father results in both a lack of shared parenting models and in a corresponding lack of positive role models for boys and girls with respect to appropriate interactions between males and females. They go on to assert that girls who grow up without their fathers are more likely to have lower self-esteem, higher levels of risky sexual behaviour and more difficulties in forming and maintaining romantic relationships than girls who grow up with their fathers. Holborn and Eddy (2011) concur with this assessment by maintaining that girls who are raised in the absence of father figures are likely to fall pregnant at an early age, to have children outside of and before marriage, to marry early or to divorce.

Holborn and Eddy (2011) contend that the absence of fathers usually results in lowered economic stability and that female-headed households are usually poorer than male-headed ones. In a study which they conducted in the United States, Small and Mather (2009) found that 62 percent of single mothers held low-paying positions with very few benefits in the retail, services and administrative sectors, which accounted for the fact that 70 percent of children who lived with single mothers lived in households whose incomes were either at or below 200 percent of the official poverty threshold. These dire financial circumstances affect the children in a number of adverse ways, as the need for their families to cut costs in every possible manner will directly affect
their degree of access to support in the form of pocket money and clothing and even determine the type of school or college which they are able to attend.

According to Erik Erikson's stages of human development, a young adult is defined as a person in the age range of between 20 and 40 years and for the purposes of this study, this age range will apply. In some instances the term “children” will be used to refer to young adults who have been raised by single parents.

A single-parent family may be defined as a household with only one parent per child or set of children who live together. It may also be defined as a case in which either the biological mother or the biological father of a child or children has complete custody of them and is solely responsible for raising them. Many factors influence the incidence of single parenthood. Single-parent families are formed when either a male or a female person chooses to have and to raise children outside of a marriage setting. They can also result from divorce, separation or the death of either of the spouses in a marriage (Uchenna, 2013). When a parent is absent from the life of a child, a void is inevitably created, because the child will be deprived of the support which would otherwise have been provided by that parent. A single parent faces a number of unique challenges and is usually burdened with responsibilities (Amato, 2005). As single parents are usually subjected to increased financial, social and emotional pressures, providing adequate care to their children constitutes but one of the challenges which they face in their daily lives (Abudu and Fuseini, 2013).

A great many social scientists have confirmed that the support which is provided by parents is vital for preserving a strong and healthy relationship with children and that a two-parent household is the ideal environment for the proper development of children (Barajas, 2011). Although previous studies have generally accepted the assumption that children who have experienced either divorce or the loss of either of their parents are particularly susceptible to a variety of educational, behavioural, and emotional problems, Amato and Keith (2010) maintain that this assumption has been proven to be wrong, as some children who have been subjected to these circumstances have
been found to adjust very well to their situations and to become very well-behaved and emotionally sound young adults.

However, despite the fact that some children who suffer the loss of parents grow up to become socially balanced and well-adjusted young adults, some research studies have shown that some of them grow up to develop socially unacceptable characteristics. As Amato and Maynard (2007) have explained, the influence of the differences between the settings of children in single-parent families and those of stable two-parent parent families can persist well into adulthood. From this assertion it may be assumed that how young adults behave and act in society has been influenced, to a large extent, by how they were raised as children. As an example, a young adult who has lived through the divorce of his or her parents during childhood is particularly likely to experience difficulty advancing in the socio-economic sphere, to have an increased risk of having children outside of marriage, weak relationships with the parents with whom he or she does not live, low psychological well-being, poor marital commitment and of his or her own marriage ending in divorce, although this is not always the case (Amato and Maynard, 2007).

As Amato (2005) has explained, the actions and the behaviour of young adults in the various types of family structures can be attributed to a variety of different factors. According to both Amato and Maynard (2007) and Barajas (2011), a great many variables may influence the ways in which young adults develop their social skills, their emotional capabilities or the rate at which they acquire social skills or emotional capabilities. These variables include environmental risk factors, such as living in an unsafe community or being cared for in a setting which is not conducive to the healthy development of children; risk factors which affect families, such as maternal depression or mental illness; risk factors which are specific to individual children, such as personality disorders or delayed or arrested development, and serious health problems. These variables need be given careful consideration when information is gathered for the purpose of gaining a comprehensive understanding of young adults.
The objective of this study is to gain an understanding of experiences of being brought up in single-parent households and to identify the variables which had been instrumental in particular young adults becoming either successful or unsuccessful. The enormous body of literature which is devoted to single-parenting tends to concentrate on its shortcomings, frequently referring to homes as being broken and characterising behaviour within them as being disturbed, obsessive or negative in other ways, thereby inclining researchers to conclude that children from single-parent family units are subjected to significantly debilitating circumstances (Bilchik, 1999). A commonly-held belief is that children from nuclear families will develop in healthy environments, which will ensure their emotional well-being and enable them to become successful in life, whereas children who are raised in single-parent families will tend to exhibit various behavioural problems, such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school, criminal behaviour and other aberrant or socially unacceptable behaviour, both as children and as adults (Amato, 2005).

The challenges which are associated with single-parenting are well documented, including the economic and social costs and the negative consequences for children. However, the strengths which have been displayed by single parents and their children have been largely overlooked, and relatively little has been written concerning the successes which have been achieved by children who were raised in single-parent households. This study has been conducted with the intention of making a valid contribution towards compensating for the dearth of relevant literature which exists at present.

1.2 Research problem

The development of children who are subjected to numerous changes in the structure of their families may be more adversely affected than that of children who are raised in stable two-parent families (Fomby and Cherlin, 2007). Single-parenting is often associated with negative consequences for children in terms of educational accomplishments, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-esteem and social relations (Amato, 2005). In addition, children with two parents
who have two incomes tend to have financial and educational advantages over children in single-parent homes who rely on one income. Consequently, it may be concluded that in a great many cases, single-parenting entails detrimental effects on the well-being of the children, who will usually need help to cope with and to make adequate social, emotional and economic adjustments to their situations.

It has been found by several previous studies that the endeavours of single parents to meet the needs of their children often results in their spending a great deal of time away from home in order to fulfil their working commitments, which often entail being simultaneously employed in two separate positions, usually by different employers (Ardelt, Elder, Eccles and Lord, 1995). These commitments very often preclude the normal development of viable relationships between working single parents and their children (Jarrett, 1997).

The loss of a parent, whether through death or divorce, is usually an extremely traumatic experience for a child. Children who experience the death or the separation of parents may experience grief, denial, guilt and display a variety of deviant behaviours. Although some children may continue to exhibit some of these characteristics as they grow older and even in some cases to exhibit them to an increasing degree, with time others may adjust very well and resume their normal functioning. However, there is a limited amount of research to show whether or not children who appear to have adjusted well still display these characteristics. This study aims to remedy this shortage by investigating the long-term effects of single-parenting. Its ultimate purpose is to influence the formulation of effective policies to help those children who experience great difficulty in coping and adjusting to living in single-parent families, in order to enable them to become well-adjusted adults.

Children from single-parent homes tend to be viewed in terms of failure, as opposed to success. The literature generally characterises them as having low self-esteem and tending to display irresponsible behaviour, which can result in their engaging in criminal activities. The challenges
which they face, coupled with the negative perceptions which people tend to have, often undermine their own perceived abilities and their behaviour, thereby impeding their pursuit of becoming successful (Hoffman, 2006).

From the various studies which have been conducted concerning single-parenting, it appears the numbers of children who have been raised in single-parent households who have been able to demonstrate their capacity to become responsible and successful members of society are limited. One of the chief purposes of this study is to recognise those children who have been raised in single-parent households who have been able to make a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood, who have defied the odds which have been stacked against them, to emerge as successful products of single-parent households.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the research

The aim of the study is to investigate the experiences of young adults who have been raised in single-parent families. The following objectives were developed in order to guide the study:

• To analyse the circumstances which contributed to the ability or the inability of young adults to cope in single-parent households.

• To explore the effects of single-parenting on the levels of educational achievement of young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes.

• To investigate the nature of the social relationships which exist between young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families, such as their parents and siblings and their own spouses and children.
1.4 Research questions

• What are the circumstances which contribute to or determine the ability or the inability of young adults to cope in single-parent households?

• What are the effects of single-parenting on the levels of educational achievement of young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes?

• What is the nature of the social relationships which exist between young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families, such as their parents and siblings and their own spouses and children?

1.5 Significance of the study

As families do not operate in vacuums, their capacity to accommodate and provide for their children and also to supervise their development depends not only on parenting behaviours, practices and attitudes, but also on the social, economic, and policy environments which surround them (Casey, 2013). Accordingly, this study will endeavour to generate new information which will assist policy makers with respect to the key concerns of programmes which provide financial assistance, social welfare services and ensure the well-being of children. The significance and the importance of this research lie in its potential to assist practitioners such as child counsellors, psychologists and social workers to help children who are raised in single-parent households to adjust, to cope and to make smooth transitions from adolescence to adulthood, without suffering excessively from depression, anger, hostility or other destructive psychological responses.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study focused on the lived experiences of young adults who had been raised by single parents, from childhood through to adulthood. The participants of the study were drawn from people who were living within the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality in the province of the Eastern Cape of South Africa during the period in which the study was conducted.
1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises 5 chapters, which will be outlined in the sections which follow.

1.7.1 Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the study, in the form of the relevant background, the problem statement, the aim and objectives of the study, the research questions, the significance and the scope of the study and a chapter outline which explains how the thesis has been structured.

1.7.2 Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter will be devoted to a review of the relevant literature concerning single-parenting and its implications for the lives of children who are raised in single-parent households. The chapter will also provide a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework which underpinned the study.

1.7.3 Chapter Three: Research methodology

This chapter takes the form of a discussion of the research methodology which was employed to conduct the study. It will provide a detailed discussion of the research paradigm and the approach which were adopted in order to conduct the study, the techniques which were employed to collect the data and the methods which were used to obtain the research sample and to analyse the data.

1.7.4 Chapter Four: Presentation and analysis of the data

Chapter Four will present the findings of the study and describe how the data which had been gathered was reduced, analysed and interpreted, in terms of the methods which were used to do so.

1.7.5 Chapter Five: Summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations
This chapter will provide a comprehensive summary of the findings, present the conclusions which were drawn from them, offer suggestions for future studies and make recommendations on the basis of the conclusions.

1.8 Summary

Single-parent families are traditionally socially unacceptable and stereotypically perceived as being broken and inadequate, because their structure entails the permanent absence of one of the parents. Most studies have tended to characterise single-parent families in negative terms and to assert that they are harmful to children. A great deal of existing research has concluded that single-parent households carry an inherently increased risk of children externalising problems, through behaviour such as disobedience, aggression, non-compliance and either an inability or an unwillingness to practise self-regulation and self-discipline. It is believed that children who are raised by single parents are more inclined to encounter difficulties in their social relationships, in their intimate personal relationships and when dealing with authority figures, siblings and peers. It has been suggested, on the basis of the findings of studies which have been conducted, that children who are raised by single parents, particularly by single mothers, are more likely than their counterparts in two-parent families to commence sexual activity early, to give birth to children during their teenage years, and to become pregnant outside of marriage, to use alcohol, cigarettes and drugs and to associate with antisocial peers. The purpose of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of young adults of being raised in single-parent households and to identify the factors which have contributed to their overall success or failure.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the literature which is devoted to the experiences of children who are raised in single-parent homes and provide a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework on which it was based, with particular reference to the parental loss perspective, the economic hardship perspective and the interparental conflict perspective.

2.2 Theoretical framework Cottrell

The three perspectives from which the living experiences of young adults who had been raised in single-parent households were investigated and evaluated were selected for their ability to provide a comprehensive and meaningful context in which to conduct the study. Each will be covered, in detail, in the sections which follow.

2.2.1 The parental loss perspective

It is widely agreed that a family structure in which both parents actively participate in the raising of their children provides the best possible environment for child-rearing, as opposed to family structures which are headed by only one parent. The parental loss perspective supports this assessment by contending that “mothers and fathers are important resources for the child, each is a source of emotional support, practical assistance, information, guidance, and supervision” (Amato 1993:24).

This perspective asserts that both parents are needed to participate actively in the lives of their children for proper socialisation to take place. Both parents act as role models, in the sense that their children learn social skills such as cooperation, negotiation and compromise from them. The death of a parent or the separation of parents from each other becomes problematic for this
process of socialisation, because the quality and the quantity of the time which is spent with the other parent is either completely negated, in the case of the death of a parent, or else drastically reduced (White, Brinkerhoff and Booth, 1985). In addition, in cases in which parents are separated, children often lack adequate supervision because the resident parents are usually constrained in terms of the amount of time which they are able to devote to their children, owing to the demands which are imposed by their work. The reduced degree of supervision enables children to engage in types of behaviour which would not otherwise go unchecked, which can later find expression in delinquency, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse.

2.2.2 The economic hardship perspective

The economic hardship perspective explains the financial constraints which single parents, particularly single mothers, experience. According to this perspective, financial hardship which results from divorce, separation or death is primarily responsible for the problems which are faced by children in single-parent families (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985). It assumes that most children will live with their mothers after their parents have separated or with the death of their fathers, which usually results in a severe decline in their standards of living, because most mothers in these circumstances become financially crippled. The decline in living standards are likely to increase problems for both children and poor single parents and their ability to provide basic necessities such as adequate educational support in terms of school fees, uniforms, books, computers or extra lessons, stable and safe accommodation, proper food and nutrition and necessities for adequate healthcare are reduced significantly.

2.2.3 The interparental conflict perspective

Conflict between parents before or after separation is associated with a number of psychological problems for the children. This perspective assumes that an environment in which discord between parents is very prevalent is harmful to the well-being of children. Davies and Cummings (1994) concur with this assessment by explaining that when there is frequent intense conflict between
parents, children are at an increased risk of encountering emotional and behavioural difficulties. Children who are exposed to excessive tension between their parents are particularly likely to suffer from psychological adjustment problems and to express their feelings through hostility, fear, anger, and distress. All three of these perspectives attempt to shed light on how and why children in single-parent households have different experiences of life from those of children in two-parent households.

2.2.4 Empirical literature

Single-parent families are no longer viewed as non-traditional families in modern society, as during the past decade the numbers of single-parent families have grown exponentially (Kalil and Ryan, 2010; Ketteringham, 2007). As a result of this dramatic proliferation, interest has developed with respect to how these family structures affect the wellbeing of children. Although single-parent households, to a greater or a lesser extent, generally face various unique challenges, both for the children and for the parents, some studies have shown that some of the children in both single-mother and single-father families can and do thrive in modern societies. A general definition of a single-parent family could be offered as a family which comprises a single mother or father who have their own dependent children (Kotwal and Prabhakar, 2009:197). Generally, the percentage of children and young adults who spend a large portion of their early lives with two parents has been declining among all racial and ethnic groups throughout the world.

Single-parent families are formed in various ways. Until approximately the beginning of the twentieth century, most single-parent families were created through the death of a partner, but during the 1970s and the 1980s, they began to be formed, to a steadily increasing extent, as a result of divorce or separation. During the mid-2000s, increasing numbers of people began to have children outside of marriage while remaining single, which contributed significantly to the dramatic growth of single-parent families throughout the world (Kotwal and Prabhakar, 2009).
According to a review which was conducted by Ketteringham (2007), although a single-mother household is a more common occurrence than a single-father household, the number of single fathers has grown by approximately 60 percent during the last decade alone (Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014). The statistics which were provided by Ketteringham (2007) revealed that of all custodial single parents, 85 percent were mothers and 15 percent were fathers.

Statistics indicate that divorce rates in South Africa are fairly consistent with international divorce rates. According to Statistics South Africa (2011), the divorce rate has increased dramatically among all racial groups, with that of black population groups rising from 18 percent to 35 percent, that of Indian and Asian groups from 5 percent to 6 percent and that of coloured people from 1 percent to 3 percent. During the same period the divorce rate among the white population declined from 40 percent to 33 percent, but still, this rate is considered to be high because the white population constitutes a racial minority group in South Africa (Roman, 2011).

2.2.5 Single-parent families

According to Fomby and Cherlin (2007), as children and their parents configure a working family system, repeated disturbances of this framework may be stressful to such a degree that children who experience repeated changes to the structure of their families may experience great difficulties in making the adjustments which they need to make and in successfully negotiating the various stages of their development. The sense of disruption which they experience could also undermine their sense of security, trust and emotional development. However, as it has already been stressed, although not every child who experiences the effects of dramatic changes in their households will succumb to delinquency or other forms of antisocial or socially unacceptable behaviour, the risks are greater for them than they are for children who are raised in stable two-parent families.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that children who have experienced the divorcing of their parents may be prone to depression, emotional stress and learning problems at school.
Researchers have found that adolescents from single-parent households are 3 times more likely to suffer from depression than those who live with two-parent families (Kalil and Ryan, 2010). Some researchers have also identified a link between single-parent homes and criminal activity in some countries (Ketteringham, 2007; Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014). Statistics indicate that children from single-parent households account for approximately 72 percent of all murders which are committed by teenagers, 60 percent of the people who commit rape-related crimes and are 11 times more likely to display violent types of behaviour than children from two-parent homes (Andersson, 2002; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, 2004).

It has been pointed out that when there is only one parent present in a household, the financial circumstances of the family are likely to be precarious in a great many instances, which, in turn, generates a number of problems in the family (Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014). The findings of various studies have shown that living in low-income families can entail low levels of academic and economic achievement and can result in children feeling isolated and lonely (Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014). In addition, it has been found that children in one-parent families tend to be, for the most part, less supervised, to have their actions less frequently checked and to have, typically, less communication between themselves and their single parents than their counterparts in two-parent families (Ketteringham, 2007). From all of these findings, many researchers have concluded that a single-parent family environment has detrimental effects on children (Kalil and Ryan, 2010; Park, 2008).

A great many researchers have maintained that the courses which the lives of children take are greatly influenced by various characteristics of their families, which may be financial, social, behavioural or compositional (Hampden-Thompson, 2013). The findings from most studies have shown that any form of separation between parents, and divorce in particular, results in children suffering from various ill effects such as depression and emotional distress. In some cases, children in single-parent families are obliged to assume adult responsibilities and obligations at an
early age, which can result in depression and behavioural problems at school (Amato, Patterson and Beattie, 2015).

2.2.6 The differences between single-parent families and two-parent families

Families play a vital role in society. Most children throughout the world experience their childhood within the context of families, although the structure of their families may change during the course of their childhood or adolescence. Instability in families has been linked to adverse consequences for children, particularly with respect to behavioural problems. According to Amato and Keith (2010), children whose parents have divorced or are single mothers or fathers are likely to exhibit more behavioural problems than those in two-parent families. In addition, it has also been found that children who live with stepparents and in blended families also tend to display more behavioural problems than children in two-parent families. According to Barajas (2011), the behaviour of children who experience any kind of change in the structure of their families is often negatively influenced, compared with children in stable, two-biological parent households (Amato, 2005; Armstrong, Birnie-lefcovitch, and Ungar, 2005). According to Johnson (2010), many studies have demonstrated an inextricable connection between single-parent households and an increased recurrence of adverse consequences for the children who are obliged to live in them.

Other studies have suggested that single-parent families are not very different from two-parent families and that they have more or less the same effects on the academic performance of children in terms of the results which they achieve, or the ways in which they comport themselves socially in the schools which they attend (Amato, Patterson, and Beattie, 2015). In addition, the differences in levels of academic achievement between children in single-parent families and those in two-parent families have been found by Hampden-Thompson (2013) to be smaller in countries which have supportive social policies, such as the providing of allowances to single-parent families and the children who live in them and special leave for single parents.
2.2.7 The structure of families and academic achievement

Ginther and Pollak (2004:684) maintain that “individuals from intact families completed, on average, more years of schooling and were also more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and complete college, compared to peers raised in blended or single-parent families”. Although extensive research has been conducted concerning the relationship between the structure of families and the educational achievements of children at the individual level, considerably less research has been conducted in order to determine how the growing population of single-parent families is affecting or influencing the children at the level of whole populations (Park, 2008; Parke, 2003). In addition, the studies which have shown that the academic performance of children in single-parent families tends to be poor in comparison with that of children in two-parent families have employed average measures of academic accomplishments (Barajas, 2011). These two considerations taken together suggest that the increase in single-parent households has, to a certain extent, affected a great population of children with respect to levels of educational attainment ((Amato et al., 2015)

Some researchers claim that the rise in single parenthood, which is reflected by high rates of divorce and out of wedlock childbirth, constitutes one of the primary drivers of poor academic performance among children and related social problems, such as misconduct, the use of drugs, teenage pregnancies and poverty, in a great many societies (Barajas, 2011). The relevant literature suggests that single-parent families mainly take the form of single-mother households. Some researchers have pointed out that fatherlessness represents the most destructive demographic pattern of the present generation, in the light of the role that fathers can play in nurturing the academic progress and the overall well-being of their children (Amato et al., 2015; Cottrell, Zatezalo, Bonasso, Lattin, Shawley, Shawley, and Neal, 2015; Hampden-Thompson, 2013). The absence of the father in the life of a child is commonly considered to be one of the most significant contributors to the declining well-being of children and the poor levels of academic
accomplishment which inevitably accompany it in the world (Amato et al., 2015). Amato et al., (2015) go on to characterise fatherlessness as the engine which drives the most pressing contemporary social ills, which include crime, teenage pregnancy, the sexual abuse of children and domestic violence which is committed against women.

DeBell (2008) makes a distinction with respect to academic performance between children who are raised by single fathers and those who are raised by single mothers. He explains that the academic performance of children who are raised in the absence of a father differs from that of children who are raised in the presence of a father, in that the academic performance of children who are raised by single mothers tends to be significantly poorer than that of children who are raised by single fathers. According to Barajas (2011), children who are raised in the absence of a father tend to graduate with poorer levels of achievement from high school, to attend college at a lower rate and to perform worse in standardised tests than children who are raised in the presence of a father.

McLanahan and Adelberg (2015) suggest that growing up without a father seems to have a greater negative effects on boys, compared with girls. According to Barajas (2011:14), “children from two-parent households outperform children from one-parent households across a variety of measures” such as in educational activities and behavioural tendencies. As a consequence, many children from single-parent families may experience difficulty obtaining sufficiently remunerative employment in their adult lives.

2.2.8 The effects of home environments and the involvement of parents on academic achievement

As Nyarko (2007) has pointed out, the environments in which children are raised need to provide the conditions which are required for the positive development of their intrinsic characteristics, which makes it the responsibility of parents to ensure that the appropriate development of their growing children is not jeopardized in any way. A healthy environment constitutes one of the most
effective determinants of the academic motivation of children and environments which are conducive to the healthy development of children are generally found among two-parent families. It has been found in Nigeria that many children in single-parent families are obliged to battle for their everyday survival, through activities such as peddling, in order to procure basic necessities for their homes and their schooling. These circumstances, among other adverse factors, greatly impede their learning and their academic performance (Jude and Abiola, 2011).

The degree of involvement at home in the education of their children, on the part of parents, plays a pivotal role in the academic performance and levels of attainment of children. Marotz-baden, Adams, Bueche, Munro, and Munro (2015) maintain that parents in other types of families tend to be more actively involved in the academic lives of their children than parents in single-parent households. Even if both parents in two-parent households are employed, one of the parents usually manages to allocate time to assisting their children with their school-related activities (Brown, 2010). According to Jude and Abiola (2011), the involvement of parents includes helping their children with their homework, discussing their school lives with them and providing them with words of encouragement, as positive reinforcement is essential for enabling them to develop their academic capabilities. According to Broman, Li and Reckase (2008) and Uwaifo (2008), the educational, social, cognitive and behavioural development of children who live with two biological married parents tend to outstrip those of children who live in other family structures.

Huge contrasts have been found between children in single-parent families and those in two-parent families with respect to a variety of academic criteria, including rates of dropping out from secondary school, participating at school, the numbers of years of schooling which are completed, performance in standardised tests of achievement, reading literacy and grade-point averages (Goldner, Edelstein, and Habshush, 2015; Hampden-Thompson, 2013; Havermans, Botterman and Matthijs, 2014).
Most researchers suggest that economic resources, the occupations and levels of educational achievement of parents and the numbers of books in their homes have a significant influence on the academic achievements of their children (Hampden-Thompson, 2013).

2.2.9 The roles of fathers in families

Lindegger (2006) characterises one of the roles of fathers as helping children to establish gender identity and teaching them to transform antisocial sadistic expressions of aggression into socially useful forms of aggression. In addition, the role of a father is to mediate between his family and the world and to show that it is possible to engage actively and assertively with the world without resorting to destructive behaviour. Morrell (2006) maintains that a father is a “role model” for moulding the behaviour of his children. For Ancona (1998), a father is a fundamental and necessary figure for developing the ability of his sons to form long-lasting and loving relationships with women and sons learn poise, maturity and respect for women from their fathers.

Another traditionally-defined role of fathers is that of breadwinner or provider (Lamb and Lewis, 2010). This assessment is also shared by Morrell (2006), who maintains that fathers are required to support their children by ensuring that they have the resources which are necessary for their survival. In many parts of Africa a “big man” commands respect only when he is able to provide and to secure the best opportunities in life for his children (Lisa, Lindsay and Miescher, 2004). Cowan, Cowan, Pruett and Wong (2009) maintain that children who are supported by their fathers exhibit lower levels of neglect than children who do not have fathers. The commitment and the contributions which are made by fathers to the raising of their children differ from culture to culture.

Marsiglio and Day (1997) also emphasise the importance of the father for the enforcing of rules, the demarcation of boundaries and the administering of discipline. The traditional roles of fathers in their families enable them both to discipline and to socialise with their children. Kazura (2000)
contends that fathers usually play more with their children than mothers do, which confers on them the role of instilling cultural beliefs and values in their children.

Richter, Desmond, Hosegood, Madhavan and Makiwane, (2012) emphasise that children benefit from the financial support, care and protection which is provided by men. A man is usually able to protect his children by either preventing or stopping abuse which may be perpetrated by other men. One of the most pronounced effects of the active involvement of fathers in the lives of their children is expressed through the credibility that they give to educational achievement and the encouragement that they provide to their children. Anderson, Kaplan, Lam, and Lancaster, (1999) maintain that father figures provide substantial amounts of care and resources to children and that their absence can have a range of detrimental effects on their psycho-social development. As fathers constitute vital pillars in their families, their absence can affect children until they reach adulthood or even in later life.

2.2.10 The effects of the absence of fathers on the lives of children

According to Statistics South Africa (2011), South Africa has a high incidence of absent fathers. Bhana and Nkani (2014) explain that the range of reasons for fathers to be absent from the lives of their children includes migrant labour, delayed marriage, educational opportunities, gender-based violence and increasing female autonomy. According to Holborn and Eddy (2011), research which was conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) suggests that the presence of a father can contribute to cognitive development, intellectual functioning and achievement at school. Consequently, young people who grow up without fathers are more likely than their counterparts who have fathers to suffer from emotional disturbances and depression and to engage in antisocial behaviour. Many researchers have shown that fathers, in their parental roles of wage earners, protectors and teachers, clearly exert a significant influence on most aspects of the development of their children (Broger and Zeni, 2011).
It has been concluded by several researchers that the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children has a number of distinct dimensions. According to the most recent meta-analysis of the effect of the involvement of non-residential fathers on the well-being of their children which has been cited by (Alleyne-Green, Grinnell-Davis, Clark, and Cryer-Coupet, 2015) two pertinent dimensions of the involvement of fathers have been identified. The first concerns the affective climate, which includes the quality of relationships between fathers and their children and the levels of involvement of fathers in their activities (Baker, 2015). The second concerns the behavioural climate, which is expressed in terms of the degree of contact between fathers and their children and the extent to which fathers provide financial support to them. These dimensions contribute, to a very great extent, to the overall development of children and determine to an equally great extent how they will grow into young adults (Alleyne-Green *et al.*, 2015).

An extensive body of evidence has shown that those children whose fathers are actively involved in their lives tend to develop well-adjusted behavioural practices and general demeanours, compared with children in single-parent households with absent fathers (Alleyne-Green *et al.*, 2015; Baker, 2015; Broger and Zeni, 2011). Kimani and Kombo (2010) maintain that both daughters and sons are affected by absent fathers, particularly when their families are inadequately provided for or when their mothers are either experiencing too much personal stress or are too preoccupied to give them adequate attention. Boys are generally believed to be particularly adversely affected, owing to the lack of a role model with whom they are able to identify.

It is generally agreed that children suffer immensely from missing their fathers as their socialising agents. Children who could have been disciplined, supported and encouraged by their fathers to advance in their studies often become truant and perform poorly in their academic careers (Kimani and Kombo, 2010), which once again serves to underline the importance of father figures to enable children to become functional young adults. Dubeau (2002) found that the development of children
who lived in families which are socio-economically privileged exceeded that of those who lived in less privileged families and that the contributions which fathers make to households reduces economic stress. From all of these independent findings it may be concluded that the absence of fathers adversely affects the development of children in almost all respects.

Marsiglio, Amato, and Day (2000) maintain that the absence of a male adult in families is detrimental to the development of children, which may explain the disproportionate prevalence of pathologies which is found among the children of single-parent households. They go on to assert that the presence of both mothers and fathers in families contributes to the healthy development of their children. Amato (1993) has also alluded to the effect of the presence of fathers on their children, in the sense that the well-being of children is determined by two key factors, namely, economic or material well-being and relational well-being, which refers to the quality of both the relationships which exist between parents and those which exist between parents and their children. Fathers, like mothers, have a crucial influence on both of these aspects of well-being.

Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) found that the participation of fathers in the education of their children has a distinct and unprejudiced influence on their achievements, compared with that of their mothers. They also maintained that when fathers become actively involved, their children become increasingly likely to excel academically. McLanahan and Booth (1989) conducted research which compared children in families in which the only parent was the mother with children in two-parent families. The results indicated that children who were raised by their mothers in single-parent families tended to attain lower levels of academic achievement, to be absent from school more often, to be more likely to drop out of school than children in two-parent families and that the performance of boys in single-parent families tended to be worse than that of girls.

It has been found that children in dysfunctional families are more likely to engage in risky behaviour and to have a disruptive effect on social relationships than their counterparts in families which are functional (Holborn and Eddy, 2011). Delinquent and problematic behaviour, including
drug abuse, are often associated with fathers being absent from their families (Amey and Albrecht, 1998). Studies have shown that disruptions in the structure of families, such as the absence of fathers, may increase the likelihood of children beginning to use drugs at a very young age. Schoolchildren who do not grow up living with both biological parents are more likely to drop out of school, have children out of wedlock and to be arrested by the police than their counterparts in stable two-parent families. They are also less likely to attend college or to find secure and well-paid employment (Painter and Levine, 1999).

The absence of fathers can also result in males acquiring negative perceptions of women and sexual relationships and having little respect for women or for the value which mature adults accord to sex, which, in turn, can result in an increased likelihood that they will engage in sexual activity at an early age, that they will not view sex as meaningful or special and that they will father children while they are still teenagers. As a consequence, many males who do not have fathers often do not understand or care about the importance which love, mutual respect, and equality have in a relationship. They are simply concerned with using women and sexual relationships as a means to achieve pleasure and to gain the respect and envy of their peers (Ancona, 1998).

Children who have absent fathers are particularly likely to marry early and to have children early, both in and out of marriage, and are also particularly likely to divorce, if they marry at all (McLanahan and Booth, 1991). The absence of fathers is also associated with a greater likelihood for children to be afflicted with psychological problems which find expression in shyness or aggression than would normally be the case for children whose fathers are present (Jekielek, 1998). A study which was conducted by Thompson and McLanahan (1994) found that children who were living with both of their parents scored the lowest in measures of shyness and aggression and highest in measures of sociability and initiative, while children who were living in mother-headed single-parent families scored highest in their shyness and aggression and lowest in sociability and initiative scores.
Fathers are traditionally regarded as providers of financial support to their children, whose responsibilities include providing food and clothing and paying their school fees, all of which are frequently cited as sources of great hardship and difficulty by women whose husbands are absent (Kimani and Kombo, 2010). These hardships also directly affect the children of these women, as in many instances, they are not able to attend school because their mothers are unable to afford to pay for them to do so. In many instances, older children may have to find work to enable them to take care of their mothers and their siblings. Extreme responses on the part of children to circumstances of this sort can include engaging in socially undesirable activities such as theft or prostitution, in order to raise money for their families.

2.2.11 The socio-economic well-being of single parent households

Single-parent families have historically represented one of the most economically vulnerable groups throughout the world (Families Commission, 2008). Single-parent families which are headed by mothers generally have lower living standards, less income and fewer assets, and pay out a greater proportion of their income for housing, compared with other family structures (Families Commission, 2010).

According to Mather (2010:1), “most single-mother families have limited financial resources available to cover children’s education, childcare and healthcare costs”. In addition, single parents are often obliged to spend a great proportion of their incomes on childcare, because they do not have a co-parent to stay at home with their children while they work. In most cases, the parents in single-parent families are not emotionally and socially available to their children because they usually work extensive hours in order to earn sufficient money to sustain their households, which often retards the social and emotional development of their children.

Previous studies have found that single-parent families are usually subjected to more financial constraints than two-parent families and also that single-mother families are usually more financially unstable than single-father families. Mather (2010) explains that most single-parent
families have limited financial resources to cover the education of their children and childcare and healthcare costs, owing to the severe financial burdens with which single mothers are often encumbered and, in many cases, they may live with cohabiting partners, parents or other relatives (Mather, 2010). According to Mather (2010:2), the households of 7 in 10 children who live with single mothers are either poor or else have low incomes, compared with less than a third (thirty-two percent) of children who live in other types of families.

Children progress best in secure and steady family environments in which well-adjusted parents have reliable schedules. Teachman (2008) contends that severe disruptions in families, such as frequent transfers to different schools for the children, frequent changes of employment on the part of parents or sudden dramatic changes in family life are associated with decreased levels of well-being for children. In addition, acrimonious disputes and disturbances in families, inconsistent parenting and economic instability are very distressing for children and can affect their lives adversely, in many ways (Demo and Fine, 2010).

Kalil and Ryan (2010) suggest that diminished monetary resources contribute greatly to problems in single-parent families, which can explain the fact that changes in the availability of money have a pronounced influence on trends in families and the growth and development of children and that changes are of particular significance for households in which resources are limited. Consequently, change in the structure of families can have adverse implications for children in low-income households (Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014).

This point is expanded upon by Mandara and Murray (2006) who found that economic hardship causes parents emotional distress, which, in turn, can hinder their abilities to be sensitive, supportive and dependable. As parents whose incomes are low often have fewer emotional resources overall than those who earn higher incomes, the effects of financial adversity on relationships between parents and their children and on the well-being of their children could be
particularly long-lasting and debilitating in instances of changes which have negative consequences for poorer families.

For children in low-income families such as single-mother families, financial constraints of this sort are detrimental to their academic progress for many different reasons. Parents in low-income households are usually unable to buy items which afford educational opportunities to their children or to pay for extracurricular exercises, such as computers and summer camps, which have great potential for providing intellectual and social stimulation to children and exerting a positive influence on their academic progress (Hampden-Thompson, 2013).

Conversely, children in families whose financial resources are secure or abundant have significantly more access to educational materials, educational experiences and high quality schooling in wealthy neighbourhoods (Hampden-Thompson, 2013). Amato et al., (2015) concur that access to educational assets and support in the form of advancement exercises are considered to improve and to develop the social capital of children. In addition, reading books and taking part in highbrow cultural exercises, such as attending theatrical productions or symphony concerts, are examples of the social assets to which children in high-income families have significantly greater access than children in low-income families (Cottrell et al., 2015).

Henretta et al., (2012) maintain that family strategies, such as stipends for families and children and other beneficial privileges, are required to augment the disposable income of single-parent families in relation to that which is often available to two-parent households. Strategies of this sort have the potential to increase the numbers of educational resources in the homes of children in single-parent families and to provide money to enable them to participate in extracurricular exercises, all of which are associated with increased levels of educational attainment and achievement (Hampden-Thompson, 2013). At present it may be contended that single-parenting contributes significantly to the steadily rising numbers of children who live in circumstances which
meet official criteria for poverty, which exert a profoundly negative influence on their levels of academic achievement (Amato et al., 2015; Hampden-Thompson, 2013).

According to Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2015), parents are significant sources of social capital for their children and it is their responsibility to provide them with various types of support, including emotional support, encouragement, assistance and advice for the solving of everyday problems and help with their homework. The transferring of social capital from parents to children directly influences, if it does not determine, the academic success of children. Children in single-parent households have less access to these social resources than children who live in two-parent households (Amato et al., 2015; Ketteringham, 2007). Finally, on the basis of a review which was conducted by Amato et al., (2015), most children with single parents experience the disruption of the unions of their parents and a great many witness subsequent changes in the relationships which their parents have with other partners before they reach adulthood, which affects all facets of their development.

On the basis of a comprehensive appraisal of the reviews which were conducted by Amato et al., (2015), Ketteringham (2007) and Park (2008) it may be concluded that the instability of the relationships which exist between parents and of households and turbulence and uncertainty in the lives of children are all associated with a diversity of problems for children in a great many spheres of their lives, including their academic performance and their levels of educational attainment. Having a childhood which is characterised by poverty increases the likelihood of becoming a single parent and of the academic failure of children who are raised in single-parent families (Amato et al., 2015). In addition, some parents have particular personality traits which are likely to exert an adverse influence on the academic progress of their children, such as a low degree of psychological adjustment, an undeveloped sense of identity, alcohol or substance abuse, poor social skills and poor child-rearing abilities (Amato et al., 2015; Finan, Schulz, Gordon and Ohannessian, 2015; Goldner et al., 2015). These personality traits contribute to the risk of
disruptions in the relationships of parents and the formation of single-parent families and they can also provide the reasons for single parenthood and lives which are fraught with problems and difficulties for their children.

2.2.12 Children who are raised in single-mother households

In terms of academic performance, emotional stability and social behaviour, children in single-mother families are generally considered to be less advanced than those in single-father families (Van Laar and Sidanius, 2001). However, some researchers maintain that children in single-father and single-mother families perform at roughly the same level at school, while children in two-parent families outperform both groups. Although Barajas (2011) suggests that economic deprivation or the absence of economic resources constitutes a more useful means of gaining a proper understanding of the educational difficulties which are encountered by children in single-mother families, interpersonal deprivation, or the absence of interpersonal resources on the part of single parents, provides a more exact explanation of why children in single-father families perform poorly at school (Van Laar and Sidanius, 2001).

According to Statistics South Africa (2011), children who are brought up in single-mother households in South Africa are much more prone to live in poverty than children who live with both of their parents or in single-father families. Of the children who live in households which are headed by their mothers, almost half or 45 percent live below the poverty line. Of those who live with their fathers and without their mothers, approximately 21 percent live in poverty. By comparison, approximately 13 percent of children who live with both of their parents live below the poverty line (Barajas, 2011). These findings demonstrate that children who live with single parents often live in circumstances which are characterised by dire poverty, compared with most children who live with both of their parents, and that significantly more black families than white families live in conditions of extreme poverty in South Africa (Abudu and Fuseini, 2013; Akanle, 2007).
As it has already been noted, women head the vast majority of single-parent homes and many researchers have documented contrasts between children who are raised in homes in which their fathers are present and those who live in homes in which their fathers are absent (Barajas, 2011). Research has also shown that children who are raised by single mothers in the absence of their fathers have lower rates for graduating from high school and attending college (Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, 2004), perform significantly worse in standardised tests and are more prone to using drugs (Mandara and Murray, 2006) than children in families in which their fathers are present or in single-father homes. It is also evident from existing research that growing up without a father appears to have a more pronounced negative effects on boys than it does on girls (Mandara and Murray, 2006; Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, 2004). Despite the fact that children who are brought up in homes in which their fathers are present graduate from high school and attend college at much higher rates than children who are raised in fatherless homes, Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan (2004) found that nearly 70 percent of children who are raised in homes in which their fathers are absent graduate from high school and that 50 percent of them attend college.

According to a review which was conducted by McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), children who are raised with one biological parent are worse off than children who spend their childhood in families in which both parents are present, irrespective of the race or educational background of the parents, whether or not the parents were married at the time at which their children were born or whether the resident single parent remarries. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) also provided evidence to suggest that boys who grow up without their fathers have more difficulty forming peer relationships and long-lasting heterosexual relationships than those who had been brought up in single-father homes.
2.2.13 A comparison of single-mother families and single-father families

Research has shown conclusively that single-mother families constitute the more common type of one-parent family (Mandara and Murray, 2006). The problems which single mothers face tend to be more varied and more burdensome than those which are encountered by single fathers. Approximately 70 percent of single mothers live in poverty, with some even earning incomes which are lower than the poverty datum line (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Murry et al., 2001). These women frequently experience great difficulty meeting the needs of their families, owing to the fact that for the most part they work in low-paying employment (Ketteringham, 2007). Single mothers usually encounter all of the difficulties which are prevalent among low-income families, while being saddled with the added obligation of bringing up children alone.

To a certain extent, the plight of single mothers may be mitigated by the tendency for them to have broader support systems than single fathers (Ketteringham, 2007; Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014). Women are frequently closer to families and loved ones who are able help them through particularly difficult and stressful times and who are able to assist with caring for their children. The position of single mothers is often made untenable by the fact that women usually earn less money than men do and are obliged to work longer hours in order to support their families, which leaves them with little time to maintain their relationships with their children (Kalil and Ryan, 2010; Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014; Park, 2008).

Single-father families also face unique challenges (Park, 2008). Compared with women, men tend to have better positions in the workforce, which provide them with higher rates of pay (Ketteringham, 2007). As a consequence, many single fathers are not continually burdened by the financial problems which tend to weigh heavily on single mothers. As single fathers are often unable to maintain the same close relationships as many mothers have with their children, the alienation which some children in single-father families may feel may incline them to use alcohol, marijuana and other illicit drugs and to engage in sexual activity at a young age (Kalil and Ryan,
2010; Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014), which effectively contradicts the contention that children who
are raised by their fathers are more disciplined in comparison with those who are raised in the
absence of their fathers (Ketteringham, 2007).

Some single fathers have given particular attention to the synchronisation of the responsibilities of
work, the supervision of their children and the management of their households (Park, 2008). As
homemaking constitutes a vital component of the role of a single father (Ntoimo and Odimegwu,
2014), single fathers who accord great priority to it are likely to develop close relationships with
their children. These fathers will have a particularly well-developed appreciation of the
responsibility which is entailed by being the primary parent and they are likely to give more
consideration to providing adequate day care and to attach more importance to the education and
protection of their children than most single mothers (Ketteringham, 2007).

2.2.14 The nature of social relationships

According to McIntosh and Chisholm (2008), divorce is associated with an increased risk of
children externalising problems. Children in families in which separation has occurred are often
more disobedient, aggressive, non-compliant and lacking in self-discipline than children in stable
two-parent families (McIntosh and Chisholm, 2008). These children are usually more prone to
encounter problems in their social relationships and their close family relationships, such as those
which they have with their mothers and fathers, authority figures, siblings and peers (Amato and
Keith, 2010). Although adjustment after the separation of their parents is very difficult for most
children, some children manage to emerge from the experience relatively unscarred and to
succeed in life by attaining high levels of education, having successful careers and successful
marriages, despite having being raised by a single parent.

As Amato (2005) explains, the actions and the behaviour of young adults within the various types
of family structures may be attributed to a variety of factors. According to Amato and Maynard
(2007) and Barajas (2011), numerous variables may influence the ways in which young adults
develop their social skills and their emotional capacities or the rates at which they acquire them. Some researchers maintain that the long-term results of children living in single-parent families include an increased probability of becoming single parents themselves and experiencing difficulty forming lasting relationships with their partners (Hampden-Thompson, 2013).

2.2.15 Conclusion

Although numerous studies have suggested that growing up without one parent adversely affects the well-being of children in a range of different ways, there is also evidence which suggests that these effects can be temporary if the custodial parent is emotionally and financially stable. In addition, these effects can be reduced with proper counselling and guidance. Some children are motivated to achieve more in life and to become better parents because of, rather than despite, their backgrounds. However, other children become emotionally scarred for life and, as adults, they may be prone to becoming violent, using drugs or neglecting or abusing their own children and are particularly likely to have unstable social and emotional relationships.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the research design and the methods which were used to obtain the research sample and to collect and analyse the data. It will also be devoted to a detailed discussion of the criteria which were employed in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings and the ethical considerations which were respected in order to ensure that the professional standards which are applicable to all research in the social sciences which entails working with human subjects were adhered to.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm may be defined as a “basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:105). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) explain that the research process has three principal dimensions, namely, ontology, epistemology and methodology and that a “research paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that defines the nature of enquiry along these three dimensions” (Thomas, 2010:292). Kuhn (1962) defines a research paradigm as a conceptual framework which provides a convenient model for examining problems and providing solutions.

Marsh and Furlong (2002) emphasise that ontology, epistemology and methodology are the fundamental dimensions of research, as they shape the approach which is adopted concerning theory and the methods which are employed to conduct research and they are grounded deeply in the beliefs which individual researchers hold concerning the world. Epistemology is essentially the theory of knowledge. Crotty (1998:3) provides a simple and concise working definition of epistemology or the study of knowledge, by offering that it is “a way of understanding and explaining how I know what I know”. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:183), epistemological
inquiry is concerned with the relationship between the knower and the knowledge and asks “How do I know the world?”

Ontology is derived from two Greek words, namely, ontos and logia. Ontos is the present participle of the Greek verb “to be”, which is expressed in the first person as “I am”, which, in turn, links its meaning to existence, and logia refers to logical discourse. Blaikie (1993) defined ontology as “the science or study of being”, as it concerns the nature of reality. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:183) ontology “raises basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world”. The word ontology is used in both philosophical and non-philosophical contexts. Philosophers make use of the concept of ontology to investigate complex questions pertaining to reality, to construct theories and models and to comprehend the world in terms of how reality is understood. For the purposes of research in the social sciences, ontology is associated with a focal inquiry of whether social entities need to be perceived as objective or subjective.

Objectivism or positivism and subjectivism represent two diverging approaches to ontology. For Crotty (1998), objectivism is the belief that truth and meaning reside within an object and are independent of human subjectivity Bryman (2004:22) characterises objectivism as “an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors”.

Subjectivism is also known in various specific contexts as constructivism, constructionism or interpretivism. For Bryman (2004:23) constructionism can be defined as an “ontological position which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors”. A subjectivist or constructionist ontology holds that a social phenomenon is shaped by the perceptions and subsequent actions of those social actors who give it its social meaning.

3.2.1 The constructivist paradigm

Constructivism assumes that as the meanings of experiences and events are constructed by individual people, people construct the realities in which they participate (Charmaz, 2006). The
constructivist paradigm suggests that knowledge is established through the meanings which are attached to the phenomena which are being studied, that researchers interact with the subjects of their studies in order to obtain data, that an inquiry changes both the researcher and the subject and that knowledge is both context-dependent and time-dependent (Cousins, 2002). Meaning is created through an interaction of the interpreter and the interpreted (Crotty, 1998). Knowledge of the observed is constructed, rather than discovered (Levers, 2013).

3.2.2 Applicability of the constructivist paradigm

According to Krauss (2005:760) “qualitative research is based on a relativistic, constructivist ontology which posits that there is no objective reality”. Various realities are shaped by people who encounter a phenomenon of interest. For Krauss (2005:760), “the best way to understand any phenomenon is to view it in its context and become engrossed in it and experience what it is like to be a part of it”. Accordingly, by living and experiencing the lives of the participants, researchers are able to acquire rich detailed information concerning the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the people who participate in their studies concerning the events, occurrences or phenomena which are under investigation.

3.3 Research approach

According to Creswell (2003), Research approaches are the arrangements and the techniques for research that span the steps from wide presumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. There are three principal approaches to research in the social sciences, namely, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. Quantitative and qualitative methods are not rigid, distinct, polar opposites or dichotomies, but rather they represent different ends on a single continuum (Newman and Benz, 1998). Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationships, which exist among variables. Monique, Inge, and Bailey, (2011) define a qualitative approach as a method which is
used by researchers to examine the experiences of people in detail, by using a specific set of research methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations.

A mixed methods approach is positioned at the middle of the continuum, because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2003). A mixed methods approach entails collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, incorporating the two types of data and employing different research designs, which may concern specific philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The central assumption of the mixed methods approach is that the merging of qualitative and quantitative methods provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than each individual approach could generate if it had been employed in isolation (Creswell, 2003). As numerical data would not have contributed significantly to the findings of this study, it was decided to conduct a qualitative study in order to obtain detailed information concerning the experiences of young adults who had been raised in single-parent homes.

3.3.1 Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research is a research methodology which is concerned with understanding the processes and the social and cultural contexts which underlie various behavioral patterns and is concerned mainly with exploring the “why” questions of research, (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Qualitative research is an approach for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the meanings which individual people or groups attribute to a social or human problem, event, occurrence or phenomenon (Creswell, 2003:4). De Vos et al., (2011:640) define a qualitative approach as a way of describing and understanding a phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants in a research study, in order to gain a broad understanding of a complex situation. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005:269) explain that qualitative research emerged during the beginning of the twentieth century and the researchers who adopted the approach believed that “social reality was constructed and thus was subjective”.
According to Holloway and Wheeler (1996), cited by Nieuwenhuis (2007), qualitative research “studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural environment and focusing on their meanings and interpretations”. Pope and Mays (1995) concur with this assessment by maintaining that the aim of qualitative studies is to develop concepts which assist in the gaining of an overall understanding of social phenomena in their natural environments, through emphasizing the meanings which all of the participants ascribe to them and their individual subjective experiences, perceptions, beliefs and values.

3.3.2 Advantages of employing a qualitative approach

The value of qualitative research lies in its capacity to impart complex textual descriptions of how individual people experience a particular event, occurrence or phenomenon which is of interest to a researcher. It enables information which pertains to the human component of a particular event, occurrence or phenomenon, such as the conflicting behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships of people. Qualitative techniques are very valuable for identifying impalpable factors such as social norms, socio-economic status, gender roles, ethnicity and religion. When they are used together with quantitative strategies, qualitative methods can help to translate and to gain an improved understanding of the complex reality of a particular set of circumstances and the implications of quantitative data. A qualitative approach provides information which is detailed and accurate concerning human feelings, perceptions and beliefs.

In addition, qualitative findings can also be applied to people who share similar characteristics with those in the population of a research study, thereby enabling a rich and complex understanding of a particular event, occurrence or phenomenon in a particular social setting. As the epistemological presumption in a qualitative inquiry is that each person has an individual perspective of the world, it is often very difficult or problematic to generalise findings and draw inferences on the basis of quantitative research alone.
3.3.3 Limitations of employing a qualitative approach

Although a qualitative approach provides a very effective means of gathering in-depth information, the information can be very difficult to analyse. In addition, the analysing of qualitative data consumes a great deal of time, which often makes qualitative research very expensive to conduct. According to Willig (2008), as qualitative methods for collecting and analysing data integrate an extensive range of distinct techniques and epistemological assumptions, it is vital to exercise a great deal of precision in the selection of an appropriate qualitative method for conducting a research study.

3.3.4 The applicability of a qualitative approach

As this study concerns the experiences of young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes, it was concluded that the optimal means of gathering relevant information lay in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. These methods enable researchers to be flexible and to ask open-ended questions concerning the experiences of each individual participant, as a qualitative research approach requires researchers to analyse phenomena through the experiences and perceptions of those who participate in their research studies.

3.4 Research designs

Lacobucci and Churchill (2010) define a research design as a framework which is developed in order to solve a specific problem. Creswell (2014:12) explains that “research designs are types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design”. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), research designs are also defined in terms of being strategies for particular types of inquiry.

3.4.1 Quantitative research designs

Quantitative research entails the collecting and the analysing of numerical data. Data is quantified in order to enable it to be manipulated through statistical procedures to explain, describe and make
predictions concerning phenomena (Lacobucci and Churchill, 2010). Quantitative research is used mainly for generalising the results which are obtained in wide settings, in order to generate large-scale statistical data. Quantitative methods mainly make use of surveys, such as structured questionnaires and interviews, in order to collect data. The main objective of using quantitative methods is to provide findings which, once they have been analysed statistically, can produce widely representative data which can be applied to whole populations.

### 3.4.2 Qualitative research designs

This study used a qualitative research design which incorporated a phenomenological approach, in order to enable the researcher to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings which people assign to them.

Creswell (2014:14) describes a phenomenological research design as a “design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants”. Van Manen (1990) defines phenomenology in terms of the perceptions of individual people of the meaning of an incident or an event, as opposed to the incident or event itself as it exists outside of those people. He goes on to explain that phenomenological inquiry centres on what people experience with respect to a particular phenomenon and how they interpret those encounters. The goal of phenomenological studies is to describe the meanings which experiences have for each individual person (Nieswiadomy, 2011:172). The aim of a phenomenological research study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions, perspectives and beliefs of people concerning a particular situation or phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). As this study concerns the subjective experiences of young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes, a phenomenological approach was considered to be most appropriate, as it would enable lived human experiences to be investigated and interpreted though the descriptions which were provided by the people who participated in the study (Nieswiadomy, 2011:172). A phenomenological research design provides
a platform for researchers to gain and understand comprehensive and profound knowledge of people's experiences. This study intends to acquire knowledge of the lived experiences of individuals raised by single parents, hence the application of the phenomenological research design.

3.5 Research populations and samples

Polit and Hungler (1999:37) refer to a population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members which conform to a particular set of specifications. A research population is, generally, a large collection of individual people or objects which constitutes the main focus of a scientific inquiry. The data was gathered from the participants in the five locations in the former Nkonkobe Local Municipality, which has recently been merged with the Nxuba Local Municipality to create the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality. The group which was targeted as the population for the purposes of this study comprised the male and female young adults between the ages of 22 and 39 years from all racial groups, including blacks, whites and coloureds who had been raised in single-parent households.

Sampling entails the process of selecting a group of subjects for a study in such a way that the individual members of the research sample are representative of the larger group from which they have been selected, with respect to the specific characteristics in which a researcher who is conducting a research study may be interested (Yount, 2006:1). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) explain that a sample represents the population from which it has been drawn and that conclusions are drawn from the findings which are obtained from research samples in order to achieve the specific objectives of particular research studies. According to Hardon, Hodgkin and Fresle (2004), sampling entails the selection of a number of units for a study from a population which has been defined for the purposes of the study. For the purposes of this study, a sample size of 26 participants was recruited, which comprised a focus group which consisted of 8 participants and 18 participants in semi-structured interviews.
3.5.1 Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria are the specific characteristics which people in the target population need to possess in order to be eligible to participate in a particular research study (Polit and Hungler 1999:278).

For the purposes of this study, the participants were required to possess the following characteristics:

- To be young adults between the ages of 22 and 39 years
- To have been raised by a single parent at any point in life i.e. from birth to adulthood
- To reside in the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality at the time at which the research study was conducted

3.5.2 Sampling procedures

This study made use of two non-probability sampling methods, namely, purposive and snowball sampling.

3.5.2.1 Purposive sampling

Patton and Cochran (2002), cited by Palinkas et al., (2013), explains that purposive sampling is a method which is commonly used in qualitative studies for the identification and selection of information-rich candidates for research samples. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), purposive sampling entails identifying and selecting individual people or groups of people who are particularly knowledgeable concerning a phenomenon which is being studied or are particularly experienced with respect to a particular research topic. Purposive sampling is classified as a non-probability sampling technique. The advantage of non-probability sampling lies in the ease with which it can be administered. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling tend to entail less complexity and to be less time-consuming than probability sampling. However, as non-probability
sampling techniques do not allow findings to be generalised from a research sample to a whole population, the results which are obtained from making use of them are usually limited to the people or the elements in the sample.

Creswell (1998) explains that participants need to be cautiously selected to be individuals who have encountered the phenomenon. Consequently, purposive sampling permits researchers to seek participants whom they know to be information-rich who will facilitate the gaining of an in-depth understanding of the problem which is central to the purpose of a research inquiry (Patton and Cochran, 2002). The researcher selected participants who had a great deal of experience of living in single-parent families, as they had been raised in them and were now young adults who had spent their childhood in single-parent homes.

3.5.2.2 Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is a form of purposive sampling in qualitative research which “typically proceeds after a study begins and occurs when the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to study” (Creswell 2005:206).

Snowball sampling can also be termed chain referral sampling. According to Biernacki and Waldorf (1981:141), this “method yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest”. They also point out that snowball sampling is particularly appropriate for studies which involve sensitive and private concerns, as the knowledge of insiders can be used to locate people to participate in studies. The researcher chose to use this sampling technique because matters pertaining to families are often very sensitive and private and it may be difficult to obtain suitable participants using other methods.

The researcher first gained permission to conduct this study from the counsellors and chiefs within the towns in the Raymond Mhlaba municipality and from there, the researcher got the first referrals for individuals who met the criteria of being raised by a single parent at any point in their life. The
individuals referred also referred others, although not all who were referred were willing to participate in the study, hence the sample size consisted of only 26 participants

3.6 Methods and instruments employed to collect data

The term ‘instruments’ refers to the devices which are used to collect data in a research study, such as questionnaires, interviews and observations (Census Bureau, 2010). Instruments for collecting data can also be defined as methodologies which are used to identify sources and to collect information during an evaluation (OECD, 2002).

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Schostak (2006) explains that an interview is a dialogue between two or more people, with the aim of obtaining detailed information concerning a certain topic or subject, and that it can be interpreted in terms of the meanings which the interviewees bring to it. There are several different formats for interviews, but among the most commonly used ones in research in the social sciences are one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study because they are more flexible than structured interviews, as they allow interviewees to elaborate further in their responses to open-ended questions, while using a check list enables interviewers to keep the discussion within the parameters of the research topic. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005:88), semi-structured interviews “allow depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses”.

Face-to-face interviews with eighteen young adults who had been raised in single-parent families were conducted using an interview guide. The semi-structured interviews were used to obtain rich, meaningful, subjective information concerning the experiences of young adults who had been raised in single-parent families. The interviews comprised both closed-ended questions and open-
ended questions, in order to allow the participants to disclose their thoughts, feelings and experiences concerning single-parent families freely and comprehensively.

Both semi-structured interviews and phenomenological research designs are crucial in accessing the participants’ most private and personal experiences without any hindrance or limitations. The goal of this study is to gain an in-depth insight of the lived experiences of individuals raised by single parents, hence the alignment of semi-structured interviews and the phenomenological research design.

3.6.2 **Advantages of semi-structured interviews**

As the previous point explains, semi-structured interviews have the advantage of enabling researchers to elicit richly detailed responses from participants. Creswell (2005) maintains that open-ended questions decrease the influence of the researcher, although they allow the participants to express their views more freely than would be possible in structured interviews. In addition, Arnd-Michael (2009) explains that information which is acquired through semi-structured interviews can be compared, as all of the participants are asked to express their opinions, beliefs and perceptions concerning the same general themes.

3.6.3 **Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews**

As it has already been emphasised, data which is obtained through qualitative means only cannot be generalised. According to Creswell (2005:203), “the intent is not to generalise to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon”. Interviews are also expensive and time-consuming to conduct and some people are not very willing to divulge sensitive information pertaining to their families, which can effectively limit the reach of interviews. The volume of information which is obtained may also be too great to transcribe.
3.6.4 Focus group discussions

A focus group discussion provides a means of gathering people from similar backgrounds or people who have similar experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. Mason (2002) suggests that the defining attribute of focus group discussions is their reliance on interactions within the group. Silverman (1997) maintains that focus group discussions are valuable both for channeling group interaction and for making comparisons among individual members of the group. One focus group discussion among a group of eight people was held at a venue which was convenient for everyone. It was guided by the facilitator who introduced the topics for discussion and helped the group to participate in a lively and natural manner.

3.6.5 Advantages of focus group discussions

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2006), focus group discussions are very flexible compared with the structured and stiff survey format and can be arranged and held at relatively short notice. They also allow many topics to be discussed and a great many insights to be gained, particularly with respect to the behavior and the emotions of the participants. In addition, focus group discussions allow researchers to interact with the participants, which allows increased amounts of information to be gathered quickly, including information which is not transmitted verbally.

3.6.6 Disadvantages of focus group discussions

One of the principal potential disadvantages of focus group discussions is their ability to be influenced by a few individual members who may dominate discussions, thereby creating bias. Focus group discussions are generally not as effective as they may be in other instances when sensitive concerns are discussed, because some people will, inevitably, have difficulty sharing particularly sensitive information. However, in the case of this study, an experienced facilitator played a vital role by making everyone feel very comfortable, emphasising the need for all members of the group to make equal contributions to the discussion and making the environment
as conducive to a free and informal discussion as possible. In addition, the participants were assured that their contributions to the discussion would be treated as strictly confidential and that their anonymity would be safeguarded at all times.

Both the focus group discussion and the semi-structured interviews were suitable for collecting data for this study because both interview formats allowed face-to-face interaction with the participants, which afforded the researcher room to ask further questions or to ask for further elaboration concerning the topic, in order to obtain deep insights into the experiences of the participants.

3.7 The analysis of the data

"Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data" (Marshall and Rossman, 1989:111). Thematic data analysis was employed, which involved identifying patterns which answered the research questions which guided the study. Patterns were identified through a difficult but thorough process of familiarisation with the data, coding the data, the development of themes and revision.

The data was analysed through a variety of stages, which included examining and recording patterns and these stages were sometimes repeated. The process of analysis did not follow any particular order. The beginning stages involved reading the transcripts over and over again, in order to enable the researcher to familiarise herself with the data and to identify common themes. This process was followed by grouping similar information into categories for easy identification. The process of coding was repeated several times, in order to refine themes and categories.
3.8 Trustworthiness of the data

Quantitative and qualitative research employ different criteria to assess validity, reliability and objectivity. The interpretative nature of qualitative research makes the validity of its content analysis different from that of quantitative research. Eisner (1991:53) explains that “there are no operationally defined truth tests to apply to qualitative research”. For the purposes of this study, the Lincoln and Guba (1985) assessment tools of worthiness of qualitative research were applied. According to Gasson (2004), the trustworthiness of qualitative research is determined through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability which were advanced by Lincoln and Guba.

3.8.1 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 296) define credibility in terms of the ability of researchers to demonstrate that the phenomena which particular research studies have attempted to study and to evaluate have been accurately identified and described, in a manner which is “credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities”, or the participants in their studies. Lincoln and Guba (2000) contend that credibility concerns internal consistency, whose core concern is “how we ensure rigour in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so” (Gasson, 2004:95).

There are different ways of establishing the credibility of data, including member checking, the triangulation of data, collecting data from multiple sources and pilot testing of research instruments. The researcher employed member checking, which is also known as informant feedback or respondent validation, to ensure the credibility of the data. The report containing the interpretation of the data was made available to a few of the members of the sample, in order to enable them to evaluate the interpretations of the researcher of their responses.
3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability may be defined as the extent to which the findings of a study can be generalised to other contexts. According to Streubert, and Carpenter (2003:39), transferability can also be termed “fittingness”, because it verifies whether or not the findings are likely to fit in similar situations. They go on to explain that any potential user of the findings will need to determine whether the findings could be transferable or not. Transferability can be achieved through the use of sufficiently comprehensive descriptions of the context of the research, to enable potential users of the findings to have sufficient descriptive data to assess and to evaluate whether the findings could be applied to other contexts or not. This study will include detailed descriptions of its specific context to enable other researchers to transfer the findings to the contexts of their own studies.

3.8.3 Dependability

Polit and Hungler (2004:435) explain that dependability refers to the stability of data over time and that it can be established through stepwise replication, audit trails, code-recode strategies and peer examination or iterator comparisons (Ary et al., 2010). According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), dependability is achieved by providing a clear rationale for the research design. In qualitative research dependability refers to the ability to replicate findings with the same participants in the same environment through obtaining similar results (Babbie and Mouton 2009:278).

This study made use of stepwise replication in order to achieve dependability. Chilisa and Preece (2005), cited by Anney (2014:278), explain that “stepwise replication is a qualitative research data evaluation procedure where two or more researchers analyse the same data separately and compare the results”. Ary et al., (2010) suggest that any inconsistencies which are found in the separate analyses should be tackled, in order to improve the dependability of the inquiry. Conversely, if the second analysis generates similar results, it means that the dependability of the inquiry has been established. Another researcher was given the platform to analyse the data
separately and then afterwards the results were compared. Furthermore, the researcher allowed
the participants to evaluate the findings, interpretations and recommendations of the study to find
out if they (the participants) align to these finding and interpretations and all the participants were
satisfied.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the results of an inquiry can be corroborated by other
researchers (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). According to Tobin and Begley (2004:392), confirmability is
“concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the
inquirer’s imagination, but are clearly derived from the data”. According to Gasson (2004:93),
confirmability ensures that “findings should represent, as far as is humanly possible, the situation
being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher”. Glenn and
Bowen (2009) maintain that confirmability in qualitative studies can be established through an audit
trial, a reflexive journal and triangulation. In order to ensure the confirmability of the findings of this
study, the researcher made use of triangulation, which entailed the participation of several
observers, interviewers or researchers to compare and to check the processes of collecting and
interpreting the data.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Research ethics are principles which guide the conduct of researchers during the investigation
processes of their research studies, with respect to fellow researchers, those who participate in
their studies, users of the research and society in general. These norms enable criteria for
acceptable research practices to be established and ensure that standards for proper conduct
towards participants are adhered to at all time and that unacceptable practices, such as fabricating
data, have no place in research. The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics
Committee of the University of Fort Hare to ensure that the research would be conducted in
accordance with standards of professional research in the social sciences.
3.9.1 Informed consent

Informed consent entails a voluntary decision to agree to participate in a research study. According to Alkhatib, Regan and Jackson (2008), all of the potential participants in a study need to be given adequate information concerning the protocols of the research in a way which promotes their understanding of the nature of the research. It is imperative that the participants should be allowed to decide whether or not to participate in an environment which is completely free of any form of coercion. The purpose of the research was clearly explained to the participants in this study, who were also told how the data would be collected and used and that their anonymity would be guaranteed, before they signed the informed consent forms. In addition, they were also informed of their right to decline to take part in the study, either before or during the conducting of it.

A majority of the participants were very hesitant to partake this study because of its sensitive nature and also the beliefs and stereotypes surrounding single parenting especially in the case of single mothers. However, they were assured that the researcher would not be judgemental and also that their information was to remain confidential. Furthermore, they were told that their identities would remain anonymous.

3.9.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to the obligation of researchers to safeguard the information which is entrusted to them and the identities of the participants. This obligation entails protecting all of the information from theft or unauthorised access, use or modification. The ability of researchers to maintain confidentiality promotes a relationship of trust between researchers and the participants in their studies. The information which was gathered during the conducting of this study was treated as being strictly confidential and it was used solely for academic purposes. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of the participants and to keep their true identities private. The participants were informed that their personal information, including their names, would not be disclosed to anyone and the limits of confidentiality were also explained to them.
3.9.3 Voluntary participation

According to Lavrakas (2008), voluntary participation refers to the right of participants to exercise free will in deciding whether or not to participate in a research activity. The principle of voluntary participation requires that participants should not be coerced in any way into taking part in a research exercise and that neither should they be given false information in order to secure their participation. The researcher explained very carefully to the participants that it was their right to agree or not to agree to take part in the study and that the decision whether or not to do so would be theirs alone.

3.9.4 Avoidance of harm

The researcher took great care not to expose the participants to any form of physical or psychological harm during the conducting of this study, in accordance with the ethical standards which require that researchers should not place participants in any potentially harmful or harmful situation during or after the research process, with harm being qualified as either physical or psychological.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology. It covered the research paradigm, the methods which were employed to collect and to analyse the data, the criteria which were applied in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and the ethical considerations which were respected during the conducting of the study. The following chapter will provide a presentation of the findings and discussion of the analysis of the data.
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and analyse the findings which were obtained from 18 interviews and a focus group discussion with eight young adults who had been raised in single-parent households. The aim of this study had been to evaluate how well they were coping, their levels of educational attainment and their social relationships after being raised by single parents.

Six major themes emerged and they were found to be common among most of the participants after they had shared their experiences of being raised by single parents. The themes which emerged included inadequate finances, key factors for success in education, stages of marital breakdown, relationships between parents and their children, marriage and romantic relationships. These themes also generated subthemes, which are shown in the relevant tables in this chapter. The chapter begins with the demographic characteristics of the participants, which is followed by a presentation of the themes and subthemes in a tabular form. After each table the themes and subthemes will be presented with some direct quotations from the participants to enrich the findings.

4.2 Demographic profile of the participants

Table 4.1 below shows the demographic characteristics of the participants, who have been allocated pseudonyms, in order to preserve their anonymity. All of the data in this study was obtained through the use of qualitative research methods. Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with 18 participants on a one-on-one basis at locations which were convenient for each participant. The remaining 8 participants of the research sample total of 26 took part in the focus group discussion. Although the study had targeted both males and females, females comprised a majority of 15 of the participants. The ages of the participants ranged between 22 and 39 years, with the average age being approximately 30 years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Custodial parent</th>
<th>Reason for parents’ separation</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasha</td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fin</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
<td>Non-marital childbirth</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Black</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Self employed</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Busi</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Father</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Portia</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
<td>Divorce</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Non-marital childbirth</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thando</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Employed</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A relatively small group of 5 of the participants had not gone beyond Grade 7 at school, which is the highest grade in primary education, while a larger group of 8 had proceeded to high school and reached between Grades 8 and 12, but had not proceeded to tertiary education. A second group of 8 had managed to obtain university degrees, while a small minority of 4 had managed to obtain postgraduate degrees. All of the remaining participants had either diplomas or national certificates from technical colleges. Slightly more than half (14) were employed, 9 of whom were female and 5 were male.

Of the 26 participants, 7 were married, while a majority of 15 were single and the remaining 4 were divorced. Half of the sample (13) had been raised by single parents as a result of divorce, 8 had been born out of wedlock and the rest had been raised by single parents as a result of the death of a parent. A very significant majority of 21 had been raised by single mothers, while the remaining 5 had been raised by single fathers.

4.3 The effects of single-parenting on the levels of educational attainment of young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes

Three themes emerged concerning the factors which had affected the levels of education which had been attained by the participants, namely, financial concerns, determination to succeed on the part of the participants and the influence of the resident parent. These themes are indicated below in table 4.2.
### Table 4.2 Factors which had affected the levels of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Explanations provided by the participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate finances</td>
<td>Shortage of basic resources for attending school, such as proper and complete school uniforms, text books and school fees</td>
<td>Some of them could not afford adequate educational materials, which hindered them from proceeding further with their education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inability to afford a stable, safe and permanent place of residence</td>
<td>A significant number of the participants had experienced hardships in affording proper stable accommodation, owing to moving from one place to another and changing schools frequently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of adequate food and clothing</td>
<td>Some of the participants expressed that they struggled to have at least two meals per day and that proper nutrition had not been a major concern, provided that they had something to eat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key factors for success in education</td>
<td>Determination and dedication</td>
<td>Most participants had tried to work hard in order to change their situations in life by achieving high levels of education and financial independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of the resident parent</td>
<td>Inspiration from their resident parents and the desire to change their lives for the better had driven them to work very hard in order to become successful in life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.1 Theme 1: Inadequate finances

Single parents are usually faced with financial constraints, which very often affect the education and the lifestyles of their children adversely. The majority of the participants had experienced financial hardships during the course of their transitions from childhood to adulthood after the deaths or the divorcing of their parents. Those participants who had been born out of wedlock had suffered more economic hardships than the others.

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Shortage of basic needs such as educational necessities

When they were asked about their ability to obtain access to resources for their schooling, such as school uniforms, school fees and learning materials, most of the participants reported that they had struggled financially, particularly in their primary and secondary education, because their resident parents could not afford to buy all of the materials which were required at school. One of the participants said:

*I did not have the proper winter school uniform, so during the winter time I missed school a lot because sometimes it would be too cold. The Eastern Cape is very cold and it rains sometimes in winter. This affected my grades a lot and I had to repeat Grade 5 because of this.* (Joe)

*I remember when I was in Grade 8, just early in the morning when the classes had just started, the principal came to chase all those who were owing school fees and in my class, only my name was on the list. When he called me out alone, I felt so embarrassed and that was the last time I went to school.* (Tapiwa)

According to Haley, she managed to complete primary school, but she could not complete high school because her mother could not afford simultaneously to pay her school fees and those of her siblings. In her own words:
When my twin brothers were 6, they had to start school so my mother could not pay school fees for all of us. I was constantly sent home by the principal because of the school fees. I then decided to drop out and started to look for part-time jobs to help my mother. (Haley)

Despite these severe hardships, which caused a number of the participants to end their education either at the primary or the high school levels, some managed to attend university. Although their finances were severely strained, they strove to remain at school, with some taking part-time jobs and going to night school, while others applied for scholarships and bursaries. Some even went as far as applying for educational loans to enable them to continue with their schooling. Relevant excerpts from the interviews with two of the participants are provided below.

After high school my mother could not afford to pay for university education, so I just stayed at home for two years until someone told me that I could apply for a bursary. That’s when I applied to a university and received a bursary to study communication. (Tasha)

I almost dropped out in Grade 11 because we did not have money, but I got a part-time job packing oranges. So every day after school I would go to work, even after I passed my Grade 12. I continued with this job so that I could pay for food and residence at the university, since the educational loan covered tuition only. So right now I am proud to say that I have a Master’s degree in crop science. (Josh)

Some of the participants explained that although they understood the financial difficulties with which resident parents were burdened, they also knew that they needed to continue at school in order to break the cycle of poverty and suffering in which their single-parent
families had been mired. They expressed their sincere appreciation of the effort and the sacrifices that their resident parents had made on their behalf. It was found that most single mothers lacked the means to support their families financially, despite all of their efforts to earn money. Although some of them had even had two or three part-time jobs, the money was still not sufficient to provide the basic needs of the children, including necessities for their schooling, which had precluded some of the participants from proceeding beyond either primary or secondary school.

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Inability to afford a stable, safe and permanent place of residence

During the interviews a few of the participants revealed that they had moved from place to place during their childhood and early adulthood, mainly because their resident parents could not afford to rent even the most basic accommodation and that they were often exposed to humiliating and extreme circumstances as a consequence.

One of the participants said:

*When we failed to pay back the loan sharks and could not pay rent as well, we ran away in the middle of the night to go to our uncle’s house. My uncle’s wife made sure that our stay there was short- lived. She made our lives miserable, so we had to move again.* (Elijah)

Another participant said:

*We once stayed in a RDP house that we thought was abandoned, but after about two months the neighbors informed the owner and she come all the way from Cape Town, just to evict us.* (Tapiwa)
4.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: Inadequate food and clothing

Most of the participants felt that they had been poverty-stricken during their childhood and early adulthood and that the income of their households had been barely enough to sustain their families adequately. However, the levels of poverty which they had endured differed from participant to participant, as some had lived in relative poverty while for others it had been abject and absolute. A few participants who had lived in absolute poverty explained that they had even lacked proper food and clothing.

One participant said:

*Several times my family and I slept on an empty stomach. My mother tried to provide food for us, but still it was not enough. Most of the clothes we had were from donations.* (Edward)

Another participant described her experiences of financial deprivation with her family with these words:

*I remember that we ate good food on two days per month, the Sunday after every two weeks when my mother took her day off. She would bring leftover food from her workplace. Those were the happiest days in my family because we would have a proper meal which was enough for everyone. We did not mind that they were leftovers.* (Thando)

4.3.2 Theme 2: Key factors for success in education

Many of the participants had managed to achieve high levels of education, despite having grown up in circumstances which had been characterised by extreme financial hardships. These participants had been driven by determination, commitment and ambition. Both the interviews and the focus group discussion demonstrated that each of the participants had been motivated by his or her own experience of living in poverty either to become ambitious to succeed or merely to accept their circumstances as being inevitable. Twelve of the
participants had managed to reach the level of tertiary education, with some obtaining Master’s and PhD degrees, of whom 7 had been raised by single parents who had struggled to make ends meet.

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Determination

Although all of the participants had suffered a great deal because there had been only one parent to cater for their needs, several explained that they had been very determined to change the circumstances of their lives, despite all the hardships. Excerpts from the responses of 2 of the participants are provided below.

*It is a miracle that I passed Grade 12, because I was constantly sent home because I owed the school. It was always clear that my mother would not be able to continue hustling for me to proceed with school, so after I passed Grade 12 I got a job as a waitress and put myself through night school, but now I have a Master’s degree and I work for a very prestigious company.* (Whitney)

*I worked for two years as a security guard and during my off days I would do part-time odd jobs cleaning the yard and gardening for people. I saved some money to get into college but still at college I sold airtime and snacks. I managed to get a degree in Human Resources Management.* (Edward)

4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: The influence of the resident parent

Most of the participants who had attained high levels of education reported that apart from their own ambitious natures they had also been inspired and motivated by their resident parents. They explained that seeing their single parents struggling in dire financial circumstances had increased their motivation to work hard, despite all of the hardships. Two of the participants explained the influence which their mothers had exerted on their motivation to succeed as follows:
If it wasn’t for my mother, I would not be where I am today. She is my hero. She taught us to work for ourselves, not to rely on others, and most importantly to be hands-on, instead of just sitting and waiting for miracles to happen. She showed us that we can achieve anything in life, even if there are so many challenges. (Klaus)

My mother worked day and night to provide for us. She was an intelligent woman. She came up with lots of business ideas and initiated them, despite how small they were. I remember that we used to repair shoes and sell amagwinya at the same time. This inspired me to work hard both in school and in life generally. She taught me that every good thing comes after hard work and that is why today I have a degree. (William)

These participants reported that they had been inspired by the hard work of their resident parents to provide for them and by their commitment to their educational progress. Some of them were obviously very proud of the active roles which their parents had played in their schooling. They explained that their parents had participated in their school lives by attending parent teacher meetings, helping with homework, discussing the events which were taking place at their schools and providing positive reinforcement by giving their children treats when they passed their examinations. Two of the participants described the commitment which their mothers had shown towards their education as follows:

Every night after work, no matter how tired she was, we would go over my homework together or else we would do it in the morning before I went to school. (Kelly)

My mother never missed any parent teacher conference. She would take the day off just to be there. (Portia)
4.4 Factors which contributed to the ability or inability of the participants to cope in single-parent households

The themes which were generated concerning learning to cope in single-parent households indicated that the changes which accompany the death, divorce or separation of parents were the source of great emotional stress for the children and that the new character of their families and the responsibilities which the changes entail was extremely burdensome for them. However, most children who were faced with these circumstances adjust over time to their new situations of having and relying on only one parent. Table 4.3 below provides a narrative representation of the themes and subthemes which emerged concerning this component of the inquiry.

4.4.1 Theme 3: Early stages after divorce

Single-parenting is associated with a great deal of stress, not only for single parents, but also for their children. Many changes, inevitably, take place in the aftermath of a divorce, such as being obliged to move to a new place of residence, enrolling at a new school, assuming adult responsibilities and trying to make new friends. Very often single parents will enter into other romantic relationships which entail new people, such as boyfriends, girlfriends or even stepparents, coming into the lives of the children. Changes of this sort may be problematic for the children and could adversely affect their adjustment to their new family structures and environments and create a great deal of emotional stress for them.
Table 4.3 Themes and subthemes pertaining to the factors which had affected the levels of education which had been achieved by the young adults from single-parent households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Explanations provided by the participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early stages after the divorce or separation of parents</td>
<td>Increased stress</td>
<td>Most of the participants were obliged to move around in search of more affordable accommodation and schools. They were also obliged to assume responsibilities and perform chores at a young age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioural problems</td>
<td>Some of the participants admitted to have exhibited antisocial tendencies and to have engaged in criminal behaviour during the early stages of the divorce of their parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later stages after the divorce or separation of parents</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Acceptance of and adjustment to the new circumstances of the family and modification of behaviour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.1.1 Subtheme 1: Increased stress

Many of the participants indicated that life after the divorce of their parents had been very stressful, as a great many changes took place in their households. The children were required to assume responsibilities such as performing household chores, cooking and looking after their siblings because their single parents, usually their mothers, would be working for most of the time. For some of the participants these changes and responsibilities affected their grades at school. Relevant excerpts from 2 of the participants are provided below.

When my parents divorced, everyone was really shaken and I was 14 at that time. Being the only female left in the family, I had to take up responsibilities and try to put the house in order. I had to do the chores like cooking, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping and taking care of my younger brother after preschool. I did not have any spare time to play. I was always tired, and sometimes I would sleep in class and that year my grades dropped. (Caroline)

After the divorce I had to move to a public school and that was my first time. It was not easy catching up with others and making friends was even harder. It took me a whole term just to make friends. Everything was totally different and new. It was like a different world to me. (Joe)

The introduction of new partners into their families added to the already stressful environments in which the children found themselves. Some of the participants had not willingly accepted addition of new partners to their families, while others suffered abuse from new partners, particularly from stepfathers. A particularly harrowing account from one of the participants is provided below.
Well, you know being raised by a single mother is not easy. She did not have time for us. We only saw her late in the evening and sometimes we did not even see her, because she wouldn’t come home. The worst was when she dated this man who was very abusive. He would beat her and sometimes even us and he would take the little money that my mother had worked for and use it to buy alcohol and drugs. We stayed with this man for a very long time until she became pregnant, and he was beating her even when she was pregnant. (Kelly)

The absence of a second parent, particularly in the cases of participants who had lived in households which had been headed by single mothers, tended to arouse mixed feelings in others. Children who had been born out of wedlock or whose other parent was deceased were usually considered to be normal, compared with children whose parents were divorced. The mothers and children in single-parent families were often negatively stereotyped and in some instances, discriminated against, particularly in family or community settings, which was particularly stressful for the children who were affected in settings such as schools and play stations. In the words of one of the participants:

Other people did not understand our life and our family because there was no father in the household. People would talk about my family, saying that my mother was a failure who could not maintain her marriage. Everywhere I went I felt like I did not belong. I hated going to school or even going outside to play with others. (Tasha)

4.4.1.2 Subtheme 2: Behavioural problems

Nearly half of the participants admitted that they had exhibited problematic behaviour during the early stages of the divorces of their parents and 7 confessed to having engaged in criminal activities on at least once occasion. In the words of 2 of the participants:
A few months after my parents’ divorce I was caught shoplifting with my friends in a supermarket. (Elijah)

I remember that one day my mother caught me when I was high on drugs. I was using Mandrax and I was almost sent to rehab. (Marcel)

The participants indicated that their sense of security had decreased as a result of the absence of the parents whom they had lost to either death or divorce. This loss of a sense of security was found to be more pronounced among the children of either divorced or deceased parents than among those who had never lived with both of their parents. The participants explained that they had felt particularly insecure in the early aftermath of the divorce or the death of their parents.

4.4.2 Theme 4: Later stages after the divorce or separation of parents

A significant majority of 18 of the participants revealed that although the divorcing of their parents had caused them emotional and psychological problems, after some time they had learnt to accept and to adjust to the changes which were taking place in their lives. Some had taken more than 3 years to adjust, while for others it had taken less time, depending upon their ages at the time of the divorce and the severity of the tension which had existed between their parents.

4.4.2.1 Subtheme 1: Adaptation

Most of the participants indicated that they had adjusted to their new situations after some time had elapsed. They explained that they had begun to feel secure again, mainly as a result of learning to appreciate the effort and the sacrifices which were being made by their resident parents, particularly in the case of those participants who had lived with single mothers. One of the participants said:
My parents separated when I was 13. It was very difficult at first, especially for me, because I did not understand why, but after a while I just accepted that my father was no longer a part of our family; it was just my mother and us. (Kuda)

4.5 The nature of the social relationships which exist between the young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families

The purpose of this component of the inquiry was to investigate and evaluate the nature of the social ties which existed between the participants and other members of their families. The themes which it generated were relationships which exist between parents and their children and those which pertain to marriage and commitment. This theme endeavours to examine the relationships between the participants and their absent parents, those between their resident and their non-resident parents and the ability of the participants to maintain long-term relationships.
Table 4.4 The nature of the relationships which exist between the young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families, such as their parents and siblings and their own spouses and children

<table>
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<th>Main Themes</th>
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<td>Relationships between parents and their children</td>
<td>Hostility and feelings of abandonment vis-à-vis relationships between the participants and their non-resident parents</td>
<td>Participants whose parents had divorced tended to feel anger and resentment towards their non-resident parent because they had left them.</td>
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<td>Quality of the relationships between resident and non-resident parents</td>
<td>Conflict between their parents had adverse effects on the adult relationships of the participants.</td>
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<td>Marriage and romantic relationships</td>
<td>Marriage and long-term committed relationships</td>
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**4.5.1 Theme 5: Relationships between parents and their children**

For most of the participants dealing with the absence of one of their parents had been very difficult. Even those participants whose parents had divorced had felt great loss because, for most of them, contact with the non-resident parent was either completely lost or very limited. Although a number of the participants expressed feelings of great loss owing to the absence of their other parents, the ways in which they articulated their feelings of loss tended to vary, owing to the fact that the absence of their parents could be attributed to different reasons.

**4.5.1.1 Subtheme 1: Hostility and feelings of abandonment vis-à-vis relationships between the participants and their non-resident parents**

When the participants were asked to explain their experiences and how they felt about the absence of the other parent in their lives, they expressed a range of different emotions, from hostility to feelings of abandonment. Seven of the participants felt abandoned and forsaken by their non-resident parents. They explained that lacking and losing contact with the other parent had caused them to feel unwanted and unloved. In the words of 2 of the participants:

*I was only 6 years when my father married my stepmother. I hardly saw him or talked to him afterwards. I know and understand that he has another family, but all I want is for him to remember that I am also his child, his family. I feel as if he does not want me or anything to do with me. (Brian)*

*Growing up knowing that your parent is out there but he doesn’t care is the most painful experience. My mother tried. She gave me everything she could, but I still feel that there is a void in my life, and maybe, just maybe, if I see my father once, that void will be filled. I envy those with both of their parents. (Fin)*
For other participants, the lack and loss of contact with the non-resident parent engendered feelings of anger and hostility. A few of the participants who had born out of wedlock and had never met their fathers displayed feelings of great anger and resentment towards their absent parents. Relevant excerpts of the responses of 2 of the participants are provided below.

*I resent the man who fathered me. He was never there for me, even once. He never came to see me or even call me but he knows where to find me if he wants to. I cannot even call him a father.* (Davina)

*I was labelled and given many nicknames because I was raised by a single mother, so I hated my father extremely. I wondered how a man could just impregnate a woman and then just leave. I vowed to myself that I would love and care for my own wife and children.* (Klaus)

However, not all of the participants shared these sentiments and a number of them had very good relationships with their non-resident parents, with some even supporting the decision of their non-resident parents to leave. One of the participants said:

*My mother and I were always close. Even after she left, our relationship did not change. At first she felt guilty for leaving us with our father, but I was actually happy that she did because my father was abusive to her. She was never happy with my father, but now she is happy with her new husband.* (Caroline)

### 4.5.1.2 Subtheme 2: The quality of the relationships between resident and non-resident parents

The relationships between resident and non-resident parents were also examined, owing to the influence which they had exerted on the well-being of the participants as children and also to that which they continue to exert on the kinds of relationships which they are able to
form and maintain. When the participants were asked to describe the relationships which had existed between their parents, most of them indicated that it had been either hostile or that there had been no relationship at all. In the words of 2 of the participants:

*The best way I can describe the relationship between my mother and father is that they are just two people who had a child and there is nothing more to it. They just talk when there is a need.* (Tina)

*My parents do not see eye to eye. When we were young my father had to go through my grandmother if he wanted to see us. My mother would not even greet my father, she became very angry every time he was around. Even when my father died, she did not even attend his funeral.* (Diana)

A small minority of the participants indicated that the relationships between their parents had been amicable, even after they had separated. Excerpts from the responses of 2 are provided below.

*They are not close. However, they do interact and sometimes they both come to my house for dinner or lunch with my family, my wife and kids, so sometimes we do have great family moments.* (Josh)

*My parents were never married but they communicate for my sake and they respect each other’s boundaries. They usually communicate when it involves me, like when I was young my mother would call and ask to take me for the weekend or holidays. Apart from that, they were just like strangers.* (Tapiwa)

### 4.5.1.3 Subtheme 3: Perceptions of the participants of their resident single parents and single-parent families

Most of the participants had been raised by single mothers and they considered their mothers to have been very brave, because as children they had witnessed all of the hard
work, suffering and sacrifices which their mothers had endured in order to support them. All of the participants who considered that they had been successful in their lives attributed their success to their resident parents. In the words of 2 of the participants:

*If it wasn’t for my mother I would not be where I am today. My mother is a great person. She is incredible. My father died and left us with nothing, but my mother worked all day and sometimes even night shifts, doing all sorts of part-time jobs so that she could pay our school fees, feed us, clothe us and shelter us. Even when she got sick, she just continued to work.* (Teddy)

*Seeing my mother struggling drove me to where I am today. Sometimes she would have just one meal per day, but she would make sure that we had at least three meals. She gave up everything for my siblings and me. Despite all the hardships, she wanted us to have an education, so I worked hard so that I could change our living situation and repay her by taking very good care of her and my siblings.* (Ester)

### 4.5.1.4 Marriage and committed long-term relationships

The results concerning marriage and committed long-term relationships revealed a range of varied responses. Although a majority of 16 of the participants indicated that they experienced trust and fulfilment in their relationships, only 7 were married and the remaining participants indicated that they had reservations concerning long-term committed relationships. Three of the married participants said:

*I am happily married. I love my wife and children. I hope to stay devoted to my family. Even if my parents’ marriage didn’t work out, I pray that my wife and I will not divorce and that we will remain as one family.* (Klaus)
Every marriage has its problems, but my husband and I always try to work out our issues and we try to communicate and we respect each other. That is why our marriage works and we have been together for 13 years. (Tasha)

Of course I cannot get the marriage of the year award, but my marriage is very solid. We love and respect one another as a family and we also trust one another. That is why I am happy as a family man. (Brian)

Although some of the participants were in relationships, 10 indicated that they were sceptical about forming lasting and permanent relationships with other people, owing to fears concerning commitment and being abandoned. One of the divorced participants said:

I was married but we got divorced. Well, it was mainly my fault. I have been seeing a counsellor and she told me that I have trust issues which might have been caused by my parents’ divorce. My ex-wife is a good woman, but my fear of being abandoned drove her away. (Edward)

Some of the participants were ambivalent about marriage owing to a lack of proper role models in their lives. The absence of role models with functional and lasting marriages had influenced their attitudes towards marriage. A few of the participants explained that they did not hate marriage or people of the opposite sex and that, as their attitudes towards marriage were driven mainly by their inability to predict whether their marriages would be successful or end in divorce, they were unwilling to risk marriage. Two of the participants said:

“Personally most of the marriages that I have seen so far do not last. People get married today and two years later they don’t even talk to each other or see eye to eye, and the worst part is that there are children in the picture. I don’t want to put myself through such a situation.”(Elijah)

“I don’t have a clue of what is expected of a husband or a father. Actually I don’t know what role I am supposed to take. I never saw my father playing
that role because I was born outside of marriage. He did not even take part in my upbringing, so all I know is what my mother did for us, but I am completely blank as to how a husband and a father are supposed to behave. So the idea of marriage is very far from my mind right now." (Joe)

The participants expressed a variety of different attitudes towards marriage. Some had positive attitudes, despite the experiences of their parents and displayed a strong willingness to try to make their marriages work, despite their lack of role models to use as benchmarks. However, there were several who were unwilling even to attempt to enter into committed relationships because they feared the consequences of doing so.

4.6 Discussion of the findings

The findings will be discussed in relation to the research questions, in an endeavour to answer them. The research questions will be restated and followed by a discussion which refers to both the relevant literature which is available at present and to the theoretical framework.

4.6.1 What are the effects of single-parenting on the levels of education which are attained by young adults who are raised in single-parent homes?

The factors which affect the levels of education which are attained were found to vary from financial hardships to personal determination and the influence of resident single parents. These factors will be discussed in the following subsections and include a lack of basic needs such as educational necessities, an inability to afford a safe and permanent place of residence, adequate food and health services and the influence of the resident single parent.

4.6.2 A lack of basic needs such as educational necessities

The economic hardship perspective assumes that the economic hardship which follows divorce, the separation of parents or the death of a parent is predominantly responsible for the problems which are encountered by the children in the families which are affected
(Amato, 1993). According to Esmaeili and Yaacob (2011), “Parents who are faced with economic hardship are not able to purchase educational resources to promote children’s success in school”. Duncan and Hoffman (1985) explain that after separation, most mothers gain custody of the children, which usually generally results in a lowering of their standards of living, as many women work in low-paid positions compared with men. From the experiences of most of the participants, this study concluded that losing a parent as a result of divorce, separation or death is almost always associated with detrimental effects on the children. When one parent ceases to be present in the life of a child, the absence is characterised by the loss of the support and reinforcement which the absent parent had provided.

Single parenthood entails numerous difficulties and responsibilities, which may be too burdensome for some single parents (Amato and Keith, 1991; Amato, 2007). Single-parent families are more prone than two-parent families to live in poverty (Williams et al., 2013). Children who live with parents whose financial resources have been reduced are particularly likely to receive low-quality childcare, education, healthcare and to suffer in terms of having their material and social needs adequately met (McLanahan and Percheski, 2008), which results in children in financially-burdened families having few opportunities to develop their human capital.

The financial difficulties which are associated with single parenting have adverse consequences for the children in single-parent families and a lack of adequate income exerts a pronounced influence as a factor which determines low levels of educational attainment. To a large extent, the financial resources which are available determine the type of school which children will attend and how far they will proceed with their education. This study found that most of the participants had not been able to proceed very far with education, not because they were unintelligent, but because they had lacked the financial support which
was needed to do so. A significant number of the participants explained that although they had passed Grade 12, they had been unable to proceed any further because they had lacked the necessary financial support.

The results suggested that having only one parent had contributed significantly to the financial factors which had hindered many of the participants from attaining high levels of education and financial stability. Hughes (2005) explains that children who are raised by single parents are particularly prone to lacking economic resources compared with children in intact families. The study found that single parenthood imposed great financial burdens on resident parents and that, as a consequence, the children were likely to be affected adversely throughout their childhood and even into adulthood.

The findings with respect to levels of academic achievement appeared, to some extent, to be consistent with the literature which was reviewed, as it was often pointed out that children in single-parent families generally attain lower levels of education than those in two-parent families (Park, 2008; Barajas, 2011). However, it needs to be reiterated that it was found that many children in single parent-families attain low levels of education not as a result of a lack of aptitude, but rather because they lack the resources which are necessary to enable them to proceed further with their education. These findings align with the tenets of the economic hardship perspective, which its emphasis on the absence of a parent resulting in a decreased availability of the economic resources which are needed in order to ensure the well-being and the academic advancement of the children.

### 4.6.3 The inability to afford a safe and permanent place of residence, adequate food and health services

The findings with respect to this factor corroborate those of previous studies, because they also found that although not all single-parent families are affected to quite the same degree, a great many become financially incapacitated. Most people in single-parent families have
low standards of living as a direct consequence of low incomes (Families Commission, 2008; 2010). Other studies, such as that of Mather (2010:1), also validate these findings by explaining that “most single-mother households have limited resources available to cover children’s education, childcare, and healthcare costs”. The economic hardship perspective suggests that financial constraints may have adverse effects on the nutrition, health, shelter and education of children (Williams, 1990). The limited resources of households which are headed by single mothers may oblige families to live in very poor neighbourhoods which have inadequate and poorly-financed services and amenities such as schools, hospitals and houses. The economic hardship perspective also suggests that adolescent children in households which are headed by single mothers are particularly likely to feel compelled either to drop out of school or to attend night school and to find employment in order to contribute towards supporting their families (Weiss, 1979).

In addition, the lack of financial security which afflicts many single parents very often stems from not having stable employment, which obliges them to move whenever opportunities for better-paying employment arise. Frequent moves have a detrimental effect on their children, as many are likely to find it difficult to adjust to new environments, to fit in and to make new friends, which also affects both their education and their social lives. Some children in these circumstances are often inclined even to desist from forming attachments because they fear that when they move again, it will be too difficult and too painful to have relationships which have become meaningful to them sundered once again. The consequences of adopting strategies of this sort, in order to maintain a sense of personal equilibrium, are unlikely to be beneficial to the adult lives of these children.

Despite the adverse social conditions which children in single-parent families encounter, not all researchers concur that family structure has an immediate and independent effect on the socio-economic development of children. Song, Benin and Glick (2012) maintain that
distinctions in high school completion rates between children in two-parent families and single-parent families are significantly reduced when both types of families have similar financial resources.

4.6.4 Key factors for success in education
It is commonly believed that the acquisition of education provides the means to become successful. It was found that the influence of resident parents and personal determination had been the key factors which had contributed to the success of those participants who had achieved significant levels of educational success.

4.6.5 The influence of resident parents and personal determination
The economic hardship perspective, the parental loss perspective and the interparental conflict perspective all point to the likelihood of negative consequences for children a result of divorce. The economic hardship perspective explains that decreased financial resources result in the lowering of standards of living of children and, ultimately, in diminished levels of educational attainment (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985). Both the parental loss perspective and the interparental conflict perspective suggest that constant conflict between parents creates an unhealthy environment for children, which increases the likelihood of their suffering from a variety of disorders, such as attachment problems and deviant behaviour (Amato, 1986). However, these perspectives do not account for those children who succeed, despite having been exposed to conditions which are often sufficient to impede the academic development of many children. The results of this study indicated that the influence of resident parents and the determination of the participants themselves to succeed had contributed greatly to overcoming the effects of the negative factors which are articulated by the economic hardship perspective, the parental loss perspective and the interparental conflict perspective in a significant number of cases. In some instances the dire financial circumstances which are entailed by the economic hardship perspective had even served to motivate the
participants to work very hard in order to enable themselves and their families to escape from the trap of poverty.

The involvement of the single parents of some of the participants contributed greatly to their educational success. These parents had influenced the academic progress of their children by participating in school activities, by attending parent teacher consultations, monitoring the activities of their children at home and at school, setting rules and punishing or rewarding when necessary, helping with homework, talking to their children about their schoolwork and school-related activities and making their children aware that they had high expectations concerning the success of their children at school. These parents had also involved their children in the making of important decisions, which had given them a sense of responsibility and maturity. A meta-analysis of 77 studies which was performed by Jeynes (2007) revealed that the expectations of parents with respect to education and their active involvement in the intellectual development of their children, through activities such as reading to them and participating in school-related activities, contributed significantly to their performance at school.

A study which was conducted by Weiss, Caspe and Lopez (2006) found that responsible parenting, affectionate styles of parenting and engagement with children promotes both their social and emotional development and the development of their communication skills and their powers of concentration, thereby increasing the likelihood of their excelling in their academic and social pursuits. The results of this study indicated that in those instances in which resident parents had made a concerted effort to involve themselves in the academic lives of their children, despite shortages of time and finances, their children had been motivated to work hard in order to succeed.
4.6.6 What are the factors which contribute to or determine the ability or the inability of young adults to cope in single-parent households?

The factors which pertain to this research question will be discussed in the sections which follow.

4.6.7 Increased stress

Drawing from the experiences of the participants, it was found that divorce or the breaking up of the relationships between parents subjects the children to stressful experiences. Not only does the breaking up of parental relationships cause children to experience anxiety and depression, it also introduces several other forms of stress into their lives, including increased responsibilities such as childcare roles and domestic duties which erode the time available to them for schoolwork, playing and socialising. The parental loss perspective assumes that as most custodial parents are in full-time employment, they are constrained in terms of the time and energy which they are able to devote to their children (Amato, 1993). As a consequence, the older children in single-parent families tend to receive decreased amounts of support and supervision from their parents, while at the same time being obliged to assume more responsibilities, such as performing household chores and taking care of their siblings.

According to Hughes (2005:2), “divorce often results in many changes in children’s living situations such as changing schools, childcare, homes, etc. Children also have to make adjustments to changes in relationships with friends and extended family members”. Crowder and Teachman (2004) suggest that children in single-parent families are more likely than their counterparts in two-parent families to drop out of school or become teenage parents, as a result of the instability in their homes and constant moving. In addition, studies have shown that children who are raised in intact two-parent families tend to fare better in their cognitive, emotional and behavioural functioning than children in single-parent families.
4.6.8 Behavioural problems

The findings of this research study suggest that although children who experience divorce are affected both emotionally and psychologically, the effects are usually temporary in duration. As divorce subjects children to a great deal of emotional turmoil, some will inevitably react by displaying deviant behaviour such as abusing drugs, committing petty crimes and even engaging in sexual activity at a very young age. These findings align with those of several other studies. Biblarz and Gottainer (2000:536) found that the children of divorced parents “have higher rates of delinquency (running away or truancy) and emotional problems (depression or low self-esteem) and lowered school performance”. Simons et al., (1999) maintain that divorce increases the probability that the children who are affected by it will experience difficulty at school, engage in early sexual activity, endure emotional suffering, perpetrate acts of delinquency and use illicit substances.

These findings align with the assumptions of the interparental conflict perspective. According to Emery (1982) and Amato (1986), conflict and tension between parents is terrifying and stressful for children and can have both short-term and long-term negative effects on their self-esteem, their emotional and mental stability, their educational attainment and their behaviour. In addition, children are prone to be drawn into conflicts between parents and to being forced to take sides. As they are emotionally ill-prepared to enter domains of adult emotions, the experience is very distressing for the children and, in some cases, results in their engaging in deviant behaviour or resorting to drugs in order to try to cope with their situations. It was found in this study that during the early stages of the breaking up of the relationships of their parents some of the participants had exhibited a variety of forms of deviant behaviour in response to the trauma which they were experiencing, although these types of responses can have either temporary or permanent effects on their future behaviour, depending on the personalities of the individual participants, the severity of conflict between their parents and the ways in which it is ultimately resolved.
4.6.9 Adaptation

Deviant behaviour among children is most transparent during the early stages of divorce. Later on they usually learn to accept and to adjust, which results in their modifying their behaviour and their attitudes. This study found that the deviant behaviour which some of the participants had displayed had been a temporary coping measure and that, with time, they had learnt to accept the reality that their parents had separated and to adapt to the new circumstances of their families. During the later stages of the aftermath of divorce the children tended to display completely different behaviour and attitudes by behaving well, performing well at school and assuming responsibilities.

4.6.10 What is the nature of the relationships which exist between young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families, such as their parents and siblings and their own spouses and children?

It is commonly held that children who experience divorce exhibit antisocial behaviour as a consequence of the severity of the conflict between their parents and the breaking up of their marriages. This study investigated the nature of relationships of the participants, such as the relationships which they had with their parents and the relationships which they had in their marriages and other long-term relationships. The findings revealed feelings of hostility and abandonment towards absent parents and a range of different reactions to marriage and long-term commitment.

4.6.11 Relationships between parents and their children

The findings were similar to those of several other studies which had found that the divorce or the separating of parents very often result in strained relationships between the children and their non-resident parents. Fagan and Churchill (2012) maintain that the most severe and significant consequence of divorce is the deterioration in the relationship between absent parents and their children. According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1996), the stress which accompanies divorce damages relationships between parents and their children and
the diminishing of closeness in these relationships exerts a strong negative influence on the psychological well-being of the children in adulthood (Amato and Sobolewski, 2001, cited by Yu, Pettit et al., 2010).

### 4.6.12 Hostility and feelings of abandonment vis-à-vis relationships between the participants and their non-resident parents

The parental loss perspective suggests that divorce reduces both the quantity and the quality of contact between non-resident parents and their children (White, Brinkerhoff and Booth, 1985). It assumes that families in which both parents live in the same household as their children provide better environments for the development of the children than single-parent families because both parents are essential resources for children, as they offer “emotional support, practical assistance, information, guidance and supervision” (Amato, 1993:24). In addition, the presence of both parents in households provides role models from which children learn social skills such as cooperation, negotiation and compromise. Consequently, the absence of one parent in a household has only adverse implications for the socialisation of children.

As contact between non-resident parents and their children diminishes after separation, the quality of the relationships which exist between them inevitably tends to deteriorate after a divorce (Amato, 2001) and the disruptions to which divorce subjects families tend to create distance between non-resident parents and their children (Soboleswki and Amato, 2007). Maintaining close ties with non-resident parents becomes almost impossible in many cases, because both parents start new lives and tend to move to other places. Divorced mothers usually move to cheaper places of residence in order to cut costs and divorced fathers tend to form new romantic relationships quickly, often starting new families by doing so. Peters and Ehrenberg (2008) maintain that children whose parents have divorced spend significantly more nights with their mothers than with their fathers, which tends to create
strong rifts between the children and their non-resident parents and difficulties in making adjustments for the children.

Although parallels can be drawn between the findings of this study in this respect and those of others, some notable differences were also found. For example, Fagan and Churchill (2012) found that during the first year after a divorce, divorced mothers were usually less affectionate towards and less communicative with their children and tended to discipline them more severely and more frequently than in later years, thereby creating strained relationships between the mothers and their children during the early years following their divorces. However, the results of this study showed that most mothers intensified their protective roles as sole parents, in order to enable their children to experience the absence of their fathers less acutely. Despite their personal anguish, these mothers performed the roles of both father and mother in almost all areas of the lives of their children in order to compensate for the absence of the fathers in their homes. The findings indicated that more male children than female children grew up identifying more with their mothers than with their fathers. The closeness which develops between resident single mothers and their children tends to distance the children still further from their absent fathers.

4.6.13 Marriage and long-term committed relationships

Research shows that children whose parents have separated or divorced often experience difficulty forming emotional attachments, which very often results in failed relationships. The results of a study which was conducted by Whitton, Rhoades et al., (2008) showed that women whose parents had divorced exhibited decreased levels of commitment to their own relationships. Jacquet and Surra (2004) maintain that the effects of the divorces of parents sometimes carry into adulthood and that the female children from divorced families usually exhibit less trust and satisfaction in romantic relationships than their female counterparts from families in which divorce has not occurred. Johnston and Thomas (1996) suggest that
the offspring of divorced parents fear being rejected and abandoned and that their lack of trust impedes the deepening of their relationships.

Rhoades, Stanley, Markman, and Ragan (2012) found that people whose parents had never married lacked communication skills in their relationships, lacked commitment and were more aggressive than people who had been born to married parents. This finding was also true for the participants in this study who had been born out of wedlock, as of a total of 8 participants, only one was found to be married and to have a stable relationship. The remaining 7 were found to be either divorced or to be in relationships in which there was no long-term formal commitment.

The interparental conflict perspective holds that tension and disputes between parents has negative psychological effects on the children. According to Amato (1993), it assumes that the conflict prior to and during the dissolution process is responsible for the lowered psychological well-being of children of divorced parents. It also suggests that if the divorce or the separation of the parents is not handled well, the post-divorce conflict will continually impose strain on the children, particularly when there is disagreement with respect to concerns such as visitation, custody and maintenance. Strained relationships between divorced parents have adverse effects on relationships between parents and their children, particularly those between children and their non-resident parents, and they also have adverse effects on the long-term relationships of the children themselves.

Although divorce usually exerts a negative influence on the future relationships of the children who are affected, the ways in which people are affected in their adult lives tend to be related to their individual personalities. Some, even after being exposed to the effects of an acrimonious divorce, still manage to form and to maintain healthy long-term relationships, as some of the participants were found to have fulfilling relationships, despite their early exposure to the divorces of their parents.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the findings presents the conclusions that were drawn from them and makes recommendations based on the conclusions. The thematic analysis of the experiences of the young adults who participated in this study was performed by making use of a theoretical framework, which combined the parental loss perspective, the economic hardship perspective and the interparental conflict perspective. Several main themes generated and they included inadequate finances, key factors for success in education, stages of divorce, relationships between parents and their children and marriage and long-term relationships.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of adult children who had been raised in single-parent households. The main focus of the study was on their levels of educational attainment, their coping mechanisms and their ability to form and maintain relationships. The data was gathered from the participants in the 5 locations in the former Nkonkobe Local Municipality, which has recently been merged with the Nxuba Local Municipality to create the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality. Qualitative research methods, the form of Semi-Structured Interviews and a focus group discussion, were employed to collect the data from a research sample which comprised 26 participants, who had been selected through the use of purposive sampling and snowballing.

One of the purposes of this study had been to determine the levels of educational attainment of young adults who had been raised in single-parent homes. The results showed that although the participants may have suffered academically during the early stages of the divorces or the separating of their parents, with time and adequate resources their levels of academic performance
had, in some instances, matched those of children who had been raised in two-parent homes. In these cases financial factors had constituted the main obstacle to their academic achievements, which some had overcome by obtaining part-time employment to pay for their education, which had enabled a few to obtain doctoral degrees.

Divorce has detrimental effects on both parents and their children. The children usually suffer more, as a result of their inability to make positive contributions in order to resolve problems which they are able to understand to be veering beyond the control of anyone. The results of the study showed that during the early stages of divorce children are subjected to a great deal of emotional stress and that some respond by engaging in maladaptive behaviour such as committing petty crimes and abusing drugs. It has been suggested that behaviour of this sort is merely a means of articulating distress or of attempting to draw the attention of their parents to how they are also being affected by the divorce or the separation. It has also been suggested that, in most cases, such aberrant behaviour is only temporary and that it is not carried into adulthood. After some time, the children often begin to accept that their parents have been separated and once they have done so, a change in behaviour usually occurs. In addition, the separation of their parents often entails a great many unexpected responsibilities, particularly for the older children, who are called upon to assume the responsibility for taking care of their siblings and performing chores such as housework while their single parents are working.

The relationships between parents also affect both the behaviour of children and their relationships with others. Conflict before and, or after divorce is damaging to relationships between parents and their children and most other social relationships. It was found in this study that divorce usually strained relationships between non-resident parents and their children, in some cases to the extent of their completely losing contact with each other. It has also been found that children who witness extreme conflict and tension between their parents are often reluctant to enter into committed relationships, for fear of having the same experiences as their parents had had. However, it has
been noted that not every participant had been affected in this way, as even after witnessing the excruciating tension between their parents during and after their divorce, some of the participants revealed that they had committed, fulfilling and secure long-term relationships.

5.2 Conclusions

Most single-parent households in South Africa are headed by single mothers, more than half of whom lack financial stability, which hinders their ability to meet all of the needs of their children. Their financial instability usually affects the education of their children, who are often required either to discontinue their studies or to attend substandard schools. In addition, a great many non-resident parents, who are usually the fathers of the children, do not contribute to the financial welfare of their children after a divorce or a separation, leaving the heavy responsibility of caring for the children to one parent, who is very often either financially under-capacitated, if not incapacitated.

The conclusion which can be drawn from the findings is that single-parent families face a multitude of severe challenges, the chief of which are usually financial. As the capacity of single parents to provide for their families is limited, the implications for the futures of their children are usually not optimistic. However, in those instances in which single parents play an active role to ensure that their children receive good educations and their children are sufficiently determined to succeed, grim prospects can be transformed into high levels of educational attainment and successful careers, as it was found that despite severe financial hardships some of the participants had managed to reach the doctoral level at university, through hard work and determination, with some even having attended night school and worked during the day in order to be able to pay for their tuition. Consequently it is concluded that in direct contrast to the findings of a great deal of other research, being raised in a single-parent home does not bind its members to academic failure.
In addition, the conclusions which are drawn from this study indicate that rather than the family structure itself, it is the income of households which mainly determines the educational prospects of the children who live in them. Families with ample and secure incomes have an increased likelihood of raising successful children, owing to their ability to afford the necessities for good educations and to send their children to schools whose standards of teaching are high. Although if the income of a household is relatively high, the structure of the family should have a very limited influence on the prospects of the children for attaining high levels of education, in the case of poor single-parent households, the structure of the family can exert a very definite influence, in that children in economically disadvantaged single-parent homes can be influenced by the selfless dedication to their futures of their mothers to work very hard in order to change their living conditions.

The ultimate conclusion to be drawn from the results is that although being raised in single-parent households had affected each participant differently, the determination to succeed on the part of individual participants almost certainly represented the most significant single factor for overcoming the severe difficulties which had been experienced during childhood and succeeding in later life. In addition, the success of these participants was not measured only in terms of high levels of educational attainment and high-paying prestigious employment, but in terms of healthy relationships, overcoming the temptation to engage in criminal activity in order to compensate for their circumstances and their ability to establish their own safe and secure households.

Children tend to employ different mechanisms to cope with divorce, which are determined mainly by the extent to which they are affected by the conflict between their parents. Consequently, the severity of the tension between the parents also contributes significantly to how their children respond to their divorce. It has been noted that although children often display deviant behaviour during the early stages of divorce, the duration of the deviant behaviour is usually temporary and
they tend to modify their behaviour and accept the reality of the divorce and their new living arrangements. The age of a child at the time of a divorce is also a significant determinant of how he or she will cope.

Although previous studies have suggested that children in single-parent households are particularly susceptible to social ills such as drug abuse and teenage pregnancy, this study found that these problems are not always caused by the structure of families and instead they tend to be the results of independent individual choices. Most of the participants, despite having been exposed to many forms of deviant behaviour which are particularly prevalent in poor neighbourhoods, ultimately made choices which made their adulthood more successful than it would have been had they succumbed to adopting the deviant behaviour which they saw around them in their adult lives.

The results showed that for every participant, the experience of divorce had been different and they also showed that after a divorce most children lose contact with their non-residential parents. The situation of children who are born out of wedlock is often even worse, because usually there is no contact at all with non-residential parents. Very few cases in this study indicated that children who had been born out of wedlock had any contact with their non-residential parents. It was found that in the case of the death of a parent, the loss was often dealt with differently, as some of the participants revealed that they had been consumed by grief and that they had experienced very severe feelings of depression after the death of a parent. The emotional pain which is associated with the loss of a parent affects the behaviour of children very significantly and the way in which each child deals with the pain will play an important role in determining how they make the transition to adulthood.

5.6.3 The nature of the relationships which exist between young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families, such as their parents and siblings and their own spouses and children
Although it was found that many children become alienated from their non-residential parents after a divorce or a separation, it remains vital that contact with their non-resident parents should be maintained. In addition, children should not be exposed to parental conflicts or disputes because their lives will inevitably be affected adversely as a consequence, particularly with respect to their own future relationships. Parents should always strive to be proper role models for their children, even if their own relationships could not be maintained, because exposure to the negative consequences of marital relationships can induce a phobia of making commitments in children and witnessing acts of violence which are perpetrated by their parents can have disastrous implications for their own future behaviour in relationships.

The total absence of non-resident parents from the lives of their children places great strain on the relationships which exist between non-resident parents and their children and is likely to cause most children to grow to resent their absent parents. These strained relationships affect children even in their adult lives, to the extent of some being reluctant to form and maintain long-term relationships, owing to a fear of being abandoned. The factors which affect the adult relationships of people whose parents divorced while they themselves were still children range from the conflict which had existed between the parents, before and after the divorce, to the relationships between the parents and their children, before and after the divorce. All of the factors which emanate from these experiences of the children are likely to have a profound influence on their own romantic relationships and their social relationships.

In addition, the divorcing or separating of parents affects their children in different ways. Some children thrive, even after divorce, while others suffer from emotional breakdowns. The findings of this study differed from those of many others with respect to the commitment which single parents, particularly single mothers, demonstrate towards their children and to meeting their needs, as it was found that in most cases single mothers worked for very long hours, often in additional part-
time employment, in order to put food on their tables and that they devoted the little time which was available to them to their children.

5.3 Implications of the findings for social work practice and Implications of the findings for social work policy

Most of the research which has been conducted in this field demonstrates a strong relationship between family structure, the involvement of parents in the lives of their children and the degree of success which children achieve in their adult lives. The findings of this study, with respect to the active involvement of parents in the education of their children, showed quite clearly that there is a great need in social work practice to help facilitate the development of programmes to encourage parents to play an active part in the education of their children and to develop channels of communication to enable all stakeholders, including parents, teachers and social workers, to coordinate their respective contributions towards the goal of helping children to succeed in their educational endeavors. Social work practitioners need to employ a range of different means to enable parents, families and communities to become actively involved in the school activities of children, thereby recognising the diversity of the contributions which can be made by parents, families and communities, as valuable resources with individual strengths which are able to help to groom children to play an important role in the socio-economic development of their communities.

In addition, as the findings of the study showed that relationships between parents and their children become strained after parents have separated, resulting very often in the loss of contact and communication between children and their non-resident parents, social workers, counsellors, psychologists and therapists need to help to develop healthy avenues of communication between children and their divorced parents, particularly their non-resident parents. These practitioners also need to strive to help to establish proper communication between parents who have divorced and to establish contact between children and their non-resident parents.
The findings of the study showed that children who are raised in single-parent households which are headed by their mothers suffer to a greater extent from financial hardships than children who live in all other types of family structures. Most children in single-parent families, particularly those in single-mother families, lack the educational necessities which encourage their academic success, such as books, home computers, schools fees and uniforms. Consequently, there is a great need for family policy to intersect with education policy. The strengthening of these policies could result in significantly improved levels of educational attainment for those learners whose academic potential is being compromised by a lack of financial resources at present. In addition, policies should be directed towards linking children in single-parent families with resources, both in schools and at home, in order to foster their academic success and to enable them to provide for their needs through their own endeavors.

These policies should also employ a systems approach which allows for the participation of all necessary stakeholders for the improving of the socio-economic functioning of children who are raised by single parents. At all levels, policies need to support the creation of partnerships among schools, families and communities. Both the state and local social service agencies have the potential to empower schools, families and community corporations through clear definitions, regulations, guidelines and communication, in order to provide support for activities at the school level and also to provide the necessary information and resources. These policies also need to be implemented with a flexibility which allows everyone who is either a single parent or a child of a single parent to benefit, without any barriers with respect to race, gender or culture.

5.4 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

- The government and other parastatals in the educational sector should establish financial support systems for children who are being raised by single parents.
• Those children in single-parent families whose academic performance is outstanding should be awarded financial sponsorship to attend better schools in order to pursue their academic careers.

• The government should impose strict measures to ensure that non-resident parents pay child support or maintenance in order to contribute to the financial welfare of children in single-parent families.

• The government should offer free and private counselling services in schools in order to cater for children in single-parent families.

• Teachers should be encouraged to give particular attention to children whose circumstances at home could undermine their academic progress.

• Community programmes should be established to educate the people concerning the effects of the breaking up of families, particularly on the children. These programmes should also assist in the reduction of conflict between parents, both before and after the divorce.

5.5 Limitations of the study

Owing to the sensitive nature of the research topic, many potential participants were initially very reluctant to participate, but after the ethical standards of confidentiality and anonymity had been adequately explained to them, a number which was sufficiently large to create an acceptable research sample agreed to participate.

5.6 Suggestions for future studies

A great deal needs to be added to the body of knowledge concerning single-parenting and the effects which it has on the well-being of children and their potential to succeed in their adult lives. The following types of studies are suggested:
• Longitudinal studies which monitor the experiences of children in single-parent families from childhood through to adulthood.

• Studies which focus on the experiences of adults from single-parent families in both marriage and parenthood.

• Comparative studies of children in single-mother households and single-father households.

• Comparative studies of the levels of educational attainment of children in single-parent families and children in two-parent families in which the respective extents of financial support are equivalent.
REFERENCES


Education, Inc.


APPENDICES

5.7 APPENDIX ONE: ENGLISH EDITORIAL LETTER

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis titled “THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULTS RAISED IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN THE RAYMOND MAHLABA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, EASTERN CAPE” by Mavis Makoni has been edited by David Masters.

Should anyone want to discuss or clarify any points of grammar, I may be contacted by e-mail at gailfrank@nahoonreef.co.za and my telephone number at home is (043) 726 4829.

Yours sincerely,

David Masters
5.8 APPENDIX TWO: RESEARCH ETHICS CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Mavis Makoni is from the Department of Social Work and Social Development at the University of Fort Hare. She is asking people from the Nkonkobe Local Municipality to answer some questions, which we hope will benefit your community and possibly other communities in the future.

The Department of Social Work and Social Development of the University of Fort Hare is conducting research concerning the experiences of young adults who were raised in single-parent households in the Nkonkobe Local Municipality in the province of the Eastern Cape.

We are interested in learning about the childhood experiences of people who were raised in single-parent homes and how it affected their growth and their adult lives. We are carrying out this project to help the government, non-governmental organisations, social workers and counsellors to identify the challenges which may be faced by children who are raised in single-parent families which may also affect their adult lives. This research study will assist in the steering and the implementation of effective policies and frameworks which will help to minimise the social and economic challenges which are faced by these young adults during their early lives. Please understand that you are not being forced to take part in this study and that the choice of whether or not to participate is yours alone. However, we would really appreciate it if you would share your thoughts with us. If you choose not to take part in answering these questions, you will not be affected in any way. If you agree to participate, you may stop me at any time and tell me that you don’t want to go on with the interview. If you do this there will also be no penalties and you will NOT be prejudiced against in ANY way. Confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with professional standards.

I shall not write your name anywhere on the questionnaire and no one will be able to link you to the answers which you give. Only the researchers will have access to the unlinked information. The information will remain confidential and there will be no “come-backs” from the answers which you give.
The interview will last about 45 minutes (this is to be tested through a pilot study). I shall be asking you questions which will require you to be as open and honest as possible when you answer them. Some questions may be of a personal or sensitive nature. I shall be asking some questions about matters which you may not have thought about before, which also involve thinking about the past or the future. We know that you cannot be absolutely certain about the answers to these questions, but we ask that you try to think about what they mean to you.

If possible, our organisation would like to come back to this area once we have completed our study to inform you and your community about the results and to discuss our findings and proposals from the research and what they mean for people who live in this area.

INFORMED CONSENT by Participant

I hereby agree to participate in research concerning the experiences of young adults who have been raised in single-parent families in the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality in the province of the Eastern Cape. I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop this interview at any point, should I not wish to continue, and that this decision will not affect me negatively in any way.

I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.

I have received the telephone number of a person to contact should I need to speak about any issues which may arise during this interview.

I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential.

I understand that if at all possible, feedback will be given to my community concerning the results of the completed research.

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APPENDIX THREE: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

This study is aimed at exploring and understanding the experiences of being raised in single-parent families. Since this study is based on the encounters that young adults who grew up in single parent families go through, anyone whose age is between 22 and 39 is welcome to voluntarily participate. Anyone raised in a single parent family set up and is within the above age range qualifies to participate in this study as it explores the experiences that one goes through both as a child and as an adult having been brought up in such a family structure. There will be 18 participants for the semi-structured interviews and the focus group will be consisting of 8 members, making them 26 participants all together.
5.9 APPENDIX FOUR: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUNG ADULTS WHO ARE RAISED IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Please note that no benefits or incentives will being given to participate in this interview, now or in the future.

Also please note that you are free to decline to be interviewed and that you are also entitled to refuse to answer any particular question which you wish not to answer.

The information which is given to me will be used only for this research project and will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

Your real names will not be used, in order to ensure that no one is able to identify you.

Age……………………………………………………………

Sex…………………………………………………………

Marital status………………………………………………

Employment ……………………………………………

Level of Education ………………………………………

Objective 1: To analyse the factors which had contributed to or determined the ability or the inability of young adults to cope in single-parent households

• How would you describe your family life during your childhood years?

• Could you explain the nature of your financial circumstances, your education and your social relationships?

• What aspects of your family life shaped you or contributed to the person you are today?

• Which coping strategies did you and your family employ to deal with stress?

Objective 2: To investigate the effects of single-parenting on the levels of educational attainment which had been achieved by young adults who were raised in single-parent homes
• Which schools did you attend? (Government or private schools)

• What was the highest level of education which you obtained?

• What are the factors which made you go further or prevented you from going further with your education?

• What is your present occupation and financial status?

Objective 3: To investigate the nature of the relationships which exist between young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families, such as their parents and siblings and their own spouses and children

• Who was your custodial parent?

• If you are able to recall your childhood years, could you recall the reason for your parents’ separation (e.g. death, divorce, out of wedlock birth)?

• How would you describe your relationship with the parent who was absent during your childhood?

• How did this relationship affect your life, both then and now?

• How would you describe the relationship between your parents during and after their separation?

• How were you affected by the absence of your mother or father?

• If you are married, how would you describe your marriage?

• As you were raised by a single parent, what is your opinion of this type of family structure and would you place your own children in the same situation if you were able to avoid doing so?
5.10 APPENDIX FIVE: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAVE BEEN RAISED IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Please note that no benefits or incentives will be given to participate in this Interview, now or in the future.

Also please note that you are free to decline to be interviewed and that you are also entitled to refuse to answer any particular question which you do not wish to answer.

The information which is given to me will be used only for this research project and will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

Your real names will not be used, in order to ensure that no one is able to identify you from your answers.

Focus group themes

- Factors which had influenced or determined their ability or the inability of the participants to cope in single-parent homes
- Effects of single-parenting on educational attainment
- Nature of social relationships

Objective 1: To analyse the factors which had contributed to or determined the ability or the inability of the participants to cope in single-parent households

Describe

- Your family life during your childhood years
- The aspects of your family life which either shaped you or contributed to the person you are today
- The coping strategies which you and your family employed to deal with stress
- Your financial circumstances during the period in which you were raised in a single-parent home

Objective 2: To investigate the effects of single-parenting on the levels of educational attainment which had been achieved by young adults who were raised in single-parent homes

Elaborate

- On the schools which you attended (Government or private schools)
- The highest level of education which you obtained
• On the factors which made you go further or prevented you from going further with your education

• On your present occupation and financial status

Objective 3: To investigate the nature of the relationships which exist between young adults who have been raised in single-parent homes and other members of their families, such as their parents and siblings and their own spouses, children, friends, workmates or other social acquaintances

Describe

• The nature of the custody of you and your siblings after the separation of your parents in terms of who your custodial parent was

• If you are able to recall your childhood years, the reason for your parents’ separation (e.g. death, divorce, out of wedlock birth)

• Your relationship with the parent who was absent during your childhood

• How this relationship affected your life, both then and now

• The relationship between your parents, during and after their separation

• How you were affected by the absence of your mother or father

• Your marriage, if you are married

• Your feelings with respect to single-parent families and indicate whether you would place your own children in the same situation as the one in which you were placed during your childhood if you were able to avoid doing so
ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE
REC-270710-028-RA Level 01

Certificate Reference Number: TAN091SMAK01

Project title: The experiences of young adults raised in single parent families in Nkonkobe Municipality Eastern Cape.

Nature of Project: Masters

Principal Researcher: Mavis Makoni

Supervisor: Prof P.T Tanga

Co-supervisor:

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare’s Research Ethics Committee (UREC) I hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instruments be used, these require separate authorization. The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above.

Please note that the UREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the document
- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research
The Principal Researcher must report to the UREC in the prescribed format, where applicable, annually, and at the end of the project, in respect of ethical compliance.

**Special conditions:** Research that includes children as per the official regulations of the act must take the following into account:

Note: The UREC is aware of the provisions of s71 of the National Health Act 61 of 2003 and that matters pertaining to obtaining the Minister’s consent are under discussion and remain unresolved. Nonetheless, as was decided at a meeting between the National Health Research Ethics Committee and stakeholders on 6 June 2013, university ethics committees may continue to grant ethical clearance for research involving children without the Minister’s consent, provided that the prescripts of the previous rules have been met. This certificate is granted in terms of this agreement.

The UREC retains the right to

- Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance Certificate if
  - Any unethical principal or practices are revealed or suspected
  - Relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented
  - Regulatory changes of whatsoever nature so require
  - The conditions contained in the Certificate have not been adhered to

- Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.

- In addition to the need to comply with the highest level of ethical conduct principle investigators must report back annually as an evaluation and monitoring mechanism on the progress being made by the research. Such a report must be sent to the Dean of Research’s office

The Ethics Committee wished you well in your research.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Gideon de Wet
Dean of Research

11 January 2016