

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted with the purpose of understanding the learning challenges that the female heads of households in the Xhariep District are faced with. The study specifically investigated the learning challenges experienced by Black girl learners orphaned by HIV and Aids who are heads of households and at secondary schools. The objectives that were formulated at the onset of the study are revised in this chapter, in order for the researcher to determine whether they were achieved or not.

It was important that the literature review and the data collected by means of interviewing contributed to answering the problem question on which the study was based, and assisted the researcher to achieve the overall aim and objectives of the study. The chapter provides information regarding the following:

- An overview of the study
- Findings from the literature review
- Findings from the empirical research
- Findings in relation to the study
- Limitations of the study
- Recommendations
- Suggestions for further research

5.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The overview intends to provide a brief summary of the preceding chapters.

Chapter One

The purpose of this chapter was to orientate the reader regarding the problem statement, aims and objectives of the study and the empirical research design utilized in the study (*cf.* 1.2, 1.3, 1.5). The problem statement was translated into the main aim of the study, and focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the learning challenges that Black orphan girl learners at Secondary School level in the Xhariep District who head households experience (*cf.* 1.2, 1.4).

A qualitative research design with a phenomenological research strategy was utilized in this study (*cf.* 1.6.2.3). A qualitative design was chosen as it allowed me to document and record real events from girl learners who head households regarding the learning challenges they are experiencing and to gather data through the interview (*cf.* Appendix C).

The research was conducted with ten purposively selected Grade 8-12 learners who head households in the Xhariep District of the Free State Department of Education.

Chapter Two

The focus of this chapter was specifically to look into the life of child-headed households and the learning challenges in general of learners who are heads of families experience (*cf.* 2.2, 2.3). Firstly, a concept clarification was done with regard to child-headed households (*cf.* 2.2). Child-headed households are those in which there is permanent absence of the adult caregiver that necessitates the taking over of responsibilities by children (*cf.* Martinus, 2009:299; Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:408; Kallman, 2003:34 (*cf.* 2.2.1; 2.2.2). Furthermore, I explored the causes and effects of child-headed households. Some of the causes refer to the HIV and Aids pandemic,

chronically sick parents due to HIV and Aids, low marriage rates and mobility due to job seeking (*cf.* 2.3). The effects of child-headed households on learners revealed the following: stigmatization, discrimination, violence, abuse, child labour, limited education, psycho-social problems, responsibilities, crime and poverty (*cf.* 2.4.1 - 2.4.10).

The chapter also investigated the learning challenges experienced by learners from child-headed households which emanated from unmet needs (*cf.* 2.5.1-2.5.8; 2.6) . The following challenges were briefly explored: expectations, self-esteem, goal orientation, regular school attendance, self-regulation, self-efficacy, attributions, cognitive development, motivation, parental involvement and socio-economic factors (*cf.* Eggen & Kauchak, 2010:284 Mokoena, 2007:62; McMillan & Wergin, 2006:75; Donald *et al.*, 2004:205; Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:71; Woolfolk, 2004:158; Goffman, 2003:1; Calitz, 2001:17, 20, 43; Magdol *et al.*, 1992:8) (*cf.* 2.6.1- 2.6.8).

Chapter Three

This chapter elaborated on the empirical research design used to investigate the research problem. The research method, research design and data collection instructions were discussed in detail and the implementation of qualitative, phenomenological research by means of interviews, motivated (*cf.* 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.4, 3.4.4.1). A qualitative approach (*cf.* 3.4.2.1) was used as it enabled the researcher to study the perceptions of Black girl learners as heads of households regarding the challenges they are faced with.

The aim of using interviews was to gather relevant information from girl learners who head households to better understand the learning challenges they experience. The main topics that were addressed in the interview protocol were: basic needs, factors impacting on school performance, attention/concentration, perceptions about school, malnutrition, responsibilities, academic goals, social relationships, coping strategies and general feelings.

Chapter Four

The data obtained from the interviews was analysed and interpreted in this chapter. Participants were identified by means of numbers (*cf.* Appendix E). The main trends that emerged from the data are reported according to the topics in the interview protocol (*cf.* Appendix C), and cross referencing to row numbers in the interview transcripts support the findings obtained.

Basic needs: Although, most of the time, learners from child-headed households stay without assistance when in need of something, it appeared from the data that they get support from friends, family members (sisters, brothers, aunts, grandparents) (*cf.* 3, 88, 235, 238, 365, 509, 587, 642, 715, 789, 790, 873), other people and neighbours (*cf.* 13-14, 520, 582) and social grants (*cf.* 355-356).

School performance: The interview responses indicated that the participants experienced problems with poor school performance and failure (*cf.* 16, 119, 243, 371, 520, 591-592, 655-656, 719-721, 798, 821).

Attention: Learners from child-headed households indicated that they normally experience problems with concentrating and paying attention in class (*cf.* 182, 255, 290, 399, 535-536, 672, 748-749, 828, 896) due to reasons such as having to go to school on an empty stomach, thinking of what they together with their siblings will eat after school, worrying about the kind of life they are going through (*cf.* 38, 155-161, 163, 248, 251-252, 290, 674-675, 828, 922-924) and having stress (*cf.* 128, 131).

Perceptions about school: Some participants indicated that they find going to school challenging (*cf.* 20, 128, 376, 594, 803) due to difficulties with subject matter (*cf.* 19-20, 134) and not having school uniforms (*cf.* 806), while one reported that it is due to not having parents (*cf.* 376-378). In one instance a response indicated boredom with school (*cf.* 658-659). However, a number of the participants find going to school "*nice*" (pleasant) and "*interesting*" (*cf.* 258, 523, 725, 888).

Magnitude of food deprivation and impact of lack of food: The data revealed that learners from child-headed households find themselves having to survive without food. Most of the participants reported not having food from a day in a week to numerous days a month (*cf.* 3, 43, 172-174, 285-287, 408-412, 539-542, 613, 682, 645, 741-743, 832, 836, 837, 899).

Nature and impact of responsibilities: It appeared from the data that girls who head households are overburdened by their studies and responsibilities such as taking care of their siblings and the house chores: (*cf.* 16, 24, 27, 51-52, 185, 297, 434-436, 548, 614-615, 840-841, 930-931).

Academic goals: All the participants had future career plans (*cf.* 56, 59, 191-192, 308-310, 447, 618, 620-621, 690, 692, 757, 847, 853, 958-959).

Social relationships: Most responses indicated that learners from child-headed households share their problems with neighbours and relatives, while others indicated that they share their problems with friends (*cf.* 48, 71, 142, 224, 235, 245, 265-266, 313, 315, 324-325, 365, 422, 477, 573, 584, 591, 626, 632, 649, 697, 715, 768, 777, 784, 789, 800, 873, 942, 973). Furthermore, the participants indicated that they take part in sport activities (*cf.* 213, 319, 629, 700, 966).

Coping strategies: The participants shared their problems with friends, neighbours, and family members (*cf.* 46-48, 67, 321, 477, 566, 632, 777, 973) and appeared not to fall prey to helplessness.

In summary, the participants experienced social problems, health problems, emotional problems and financial problems which impacted negatively on their academic performance. The responses indicated that a number of the learners experience problems in understanding their school work, some have failed already, they do not attend school regularly, have problems with concentration and attention, their ability to cope is weakened, they experience health risks which cause learning barriers and time for social involvement is limited. In spite of their unfavourable circumstances, the participants appeared

to be resilient despite their adverse circumstances, and were positive about going to school and pursuing a career (cf. 4.3.4).

5.3 FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to elucidate the concepts **child-headed household** and **learning challenges**. The information obtained from the literature review was utilized for the formulation of questions for the interviews.

Child-headed households are those households without parents, but headed by young children under the age of eighteen who act as main caregivers to younger siblings (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:407; Kallman, 2003:34) (cf. 2.2.2). The chapter looked at the causes of child-headed households, the magnitude of child-headed households, the effects of child-headed households and the fulfilment of needs in relation to the learner who heads a household. The causes appeared to be the HIV and Aids pandemic, chronically ill parents, low marriage rates and mobility due to job seeking (Newell, 2008:111; German, 2006:149-158) (cf. 2.3). The literature indicates that the number of child-headed households is estimated to be 11,500 in South Africa, while (cf. 2.3.1) the magnitude of child-headed households in the Xhariep District where the research was conducted, indicated that there were 1968 double orphans during 2008 (cf. Appendix F). The literature highlighted the negative effects of child-headed households, such as stigmatization, discrimination, violence, abuse, child labour, limited education, psychosocial problems, responsibilities, crime and poverty (Martinus, 2009:302; Newell, 2008:6; Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:41; Richter & Desmond, 2008:1023-1024) (cf. 2.4.1- 2.4.9).

The learning challenges that could be experienced by learners who head households *inter alia* refer to factors which affect learning, such as expectations, self-esteem, goal orientation, self-regulation, cognitive development, school attendance, socio-economic factors, self-efficacy attributions, parental involvement and socio economic barriers which were

briefly discussed (Newell, 2008:7; Mokoena, 2007:2; McMillan & Wergin, 2006:67) (*cf.* 2.6.1 - 2.6.8).

5.4 FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The findings in relation to the needs that the girl learners experienced, the effects that heading a household had on them, and the learning challenges that they experienced seemed to be no different than the general needs, effects and challenges related to child-headed households reported in the literature review (*cf.* 2.4.1-2.4.10; 2.5.1-2.5.8; 2.6.1-2.6.11).

Findings in relation to needs (*cf.* 4.5)

The following major needs were identified from the responses of the participants: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs and esteem needs (*cf.* 2.5).

Findings in relation to effects (*cf.* 4.4)

In line with the literature, **stigmatization and discrimination** (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409; German, 2006:148) (*cf.* 2.4.1; 2.4.2), **abuse** (German, 2006:149) (*cf.* 2.4.4), **psycho-social problems** (Leatham, 2005:63) (*cf.* 2.4.6) **poverty** (*cf.* 92, 251-252, 645, 833-834, 897-899) (*cf.* 2.4.10), **violence** (Donald *et al.*, 2004:244-266) (*cf.* 2.4.3) and having many **responsibilities** (Newell, 2008:6; Roby & Cochran, 2007:20) (*cf.* 2.3; 2.4.7) were indicated as factors that affect academic performance.

Findings in relation to learning challenges (*cf.* 4.6)

Absence of expectations (Calitz, 2001:57) (*cf.* 2.6.1), **irregular school attendance** (Mokoena, 2007:2) (*cf.* 2.4.1), **a lack of self-regulation** (Newell, 2008:7) (*cf.* 2.6.5), **problems with cognitive development** (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:71) (*cf.* 2.6.8) **a lack of attention** (Shilubana, 2005:104-106) (*cf.* 2.6.4), **a lack of parental involvement** (Calitz, 2001:19) (*cf.* 2.5.2; 2.6.10) and **socio-economic problems** (*cf.* 92, 273-274) (Arends, 2009:14; Richter &

Desmond, 2008:1023) (*cf.* 2.5.1; 2.6.11) were identified as the major challenges experienced by the learners who took part in the study.

5.5 FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The central aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning challenges faced by Black girl learners who head households in the Xhariep District. In this section, I revisit the aim and objectives of the study in order to determine whether they have been achieved or not.

Objective 1: Determining the learning challenges that could be experienced in general by learners who head households

This objective was achieved through a literature review that highlighted a number of aspects. It was necessary to achieve this objective as it provided the framework for setting the interview protocol and to codes against which the deductive content analysis could be executed.

Learning challenges are inseparably linked to unmet needs (*cf.* 2.5) that cause negative effects (*cf.* 2.4) which in turn create learning challenges for learners who head households (*cf.* 2.6). In the context of the study the learning challenges *inter alia* involved the inability to learn due to obstacles such as lack of self-regulation, self-efficacy, problematic cognitive development, socio-economic factors, lack of motivation and goal-orientation, lack of parental involvement, poor performance, lack of concentration, negative attributions and irregular school attendance (*cf.* 2.6.1 – 2.6.8), (*cf.* Eggen & Kauchak, 2010:284; Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:411, Mokoena, 2007:2; McMillan & Wergin, 2006:75, 76; Eloff & Eberson, 2004:14, 71, 401; Woolfolk, 2004:158; Callitz, 2001:17).

The literature revealed that learners who do not have parents could experience physiological needs, love and belonging needs, security needs, esteem needs, knowledge needs, aesthetic needs, self actualization and transcendence needs (*cf.* Eggen & Kauchak, 2010:367; Richter & Desmond,

2008:1023-1024; Clarkson, 2006; Calitz, 2001:19; Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004: 401) (cf. 2.5.1- 2.5.8) that can negatively affect their academic performance (cf. Woolfolk, 2004:353, 2.2.5.4). It also emerged from the literature that learners feel insecure due to the absence of parents and miss the need to be loved, which then affects their sense of being motivated to learn (Calitz, 2001:19; Mwamwenda, 2004:24), (cf. 2.5.2; 2.5.4). They then often get emotional and lose concentration in class, resulting in the dropping of their performance (cf. 4.3.2).

Objective 2: Determining the perspectives of Black girl learners at Secondary School level who head households in the Xhariep District regarding the learning challenges that they experience

This objective was achieved by analysing the data obtained from the learners' responses to the interview questions (cf. Appendix C). Reference is made to the relevant sections in the literature review as well as the row numbers in the interview transcripts to motivate the findings in relation to this objective.

The data revealed by the learners from child-headed households correlate with most of the information revealed by the literature. Learners indicated various problems leading to learning challenges, such as going to school on an empty stomach, unavailability of school clothes and lack of concentration in class (cf. 4.3.1, 4.3.3). They further indicated that their performance normally drops as they do not attend school regularly when they do not have food and when they are not feeling well. It also transpired from the data that the learners struggle with school resources, especially school clothes and money to attend school. Another challenge that these learners are faced with is that they normally do schoolwork by themselves without anyone to assist, but it appeared that neighbours and friends are very helpful (cf. 4.3.1).

The main challenges can be linked to an **absence of expectations from parents** due to the fact that they were orphans (Calitz, 2001:57) (cf. 2.6.1), **irregular school attendance** (cf. 268, 383-386, 728, 815, 891) (Mokoena,

2007:2) (cf. 2.6.1), a lack of self-regulation (cf. 16, 24, 27, 277, 304-305, 388, 427, 520, 551, 604, 705-706, 820) (Newell, 2008:7) (cf. 2.6.2), problems with cognitive development (cf. 605-607, 733, 735, 798, 818) (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:71) (cf. 2.6.5) a lack of attention (cf. 181-183, 255, 290-292, 260-263, 399, 535, 536, 672, 748-749, 828, 896) (Shilubana, 2005:104-106), a lack of parental involvement (cf. 376-377) (Calitz, 2001:19) (cf. 2.5.2) and socio-economic problems (cf. 3, 88, 235, 365, 509, 576, 642, 648-649, 715, 787, 790, 873) (Arends, 2009:14; Richter & Desmond, 2008:1023) (cf. 2.5.1; 2.5.4).

Objective 3: Suggestions to support Black girl learners at Secondary Schools level who head households in the Xhariep District with regard to the learning challenges that they experience

With regard to this objective, more information is provided in section 5.7

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A number of limitations were identified for this research.

- The sample used for this study was confined to in only one district of the five in the Free State and only six schools were used, therefore the results cannot be generalized. Similar research with larger samples from other schools in the district and other provinces is necessary
- The researcher only focused on learners, excluding teachers. If the teachers who work with these learners were involved in the research, richer and more comprehensive data on the phenomenon could have been obtained.
- Only girls were at the centre of the research. There are boys who head households as well who might be experiencing the same or different challenges than the girls. Therefore the learning challenges identified in this study cannot be generalized to all learners heading households.

- The researcher only studied the learning challenges of Black girl learners who are heads of families and did not include girl learners from other cultures, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other cultures.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the research findings and the literature, I recommend the following in order to assist the girl learners in dealing with the learning challenges they experience.

- Teachers must try by all means to act as secondary parents and provide warmth and feelings of belonging to the girl learners who head households. They have to establish good relationships with these learners so that learners can experience a sense of safety, love and belonging (Mwamwenda, 2004:24) (*cf.* 2.5.2; 2.5.3).
- Teachers have to learn how to identify the needs of learners who head households in order to adapt their teaching practices to enable learners from child-headed households to focus their attention in class (Gray *et al.*, 2006:25) (*cf.* 2.3.2), and implement ways of dealing with homework to accommodate learners from child-headed households who might require extra time to complete their homework due to their overload of responsibilities at home (Newell, 2008:6) (*cf.* 2.4.8).
- Teachers need to motivate learners from child-headed households so that they find the learning process and academic activities meaningful and worthwhile (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001:246) (*cf.* 2.6.9).
- Learners need to be equipped with coping strategies in order to be able to deal with various challenges such as discrimination, stigmatization and psycho-social problems such as stress (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:411, Mokoena, 2007:60; France, 2006:6; Leatham, 2005:65; Mwamwenda, 2004:239; Larry, 1996: 370) (*cf.* 2.4.1; 2.4.2; 2.4.7).

- Teachers should in particular mediate goal-seeking, goal-setting and goal-achievement among learners who head households so that they set realistic goals for themselves and to develop ways to achieve the goals in spite of adverse circumstances (*cf.* 2.6.3). This will encourage learners to set expectations for themselves in the absence of parents to assist them in this regard (*cf.* 2.6.1).
- It is also important to mediate a feeling of competence among these learners and encourage them to cultivate a positive self-image and a belief that they are able to rise above their circumstances (*cf.* 2.6.6; 2.6.2).
- Learners need to be encouraged and opportunities created for them where they confidentially can open up and share their feelings to avoid emotional stress (*cf.* 2.4.7)
- Schools in general have to revise their school policies with regard to school uniforms and feeding schemes so as assist learners from child-headed household with basic physiological needs (*cf.* 2.5.1).

5.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study has made the researcher aware of the difficulties that Black girl learners at Secondary School level who act as heads of households in the Xhariep District are faced with. More comprehensive research on this topic would be beneficial and the following suggestions could direct further research:

- Studies could be done in other provinces to get a different understanding and view regarding the learning challenges of Black girl learners who act as heads of households.
- The same research problem can be studied with Black boy learners, and learners from other cultural groupings in the Free State province, as well as in other provinces in South Africa to determine similarities and differences in the learning challenges experienced.

- A study can be conducted to understand the social and emotional problems of learners from child-headed households with the aim of assisting them.
- A study that explores what contributes to participants being positive about planning a future career in spite of negative circumstances would provide an interesting dimension to the stereotype perceptions held that learners who head households normally drop out of school.

5.9 CONCLUSION

Child-headed households are real; they exist, and pose various challenges to learners who act as heads of these households. It is important that educators, education officials and the Department of Education realize the magnitude of child-headed households in order to support these households. Effective learning and positive academic performance are affected by unmet needs such as love and security. Teachers therefore need to reach out to learners who head households to establish relationships with these learners that could assist them in dealing with the challenges they are faced with.