

CHAPTER FOUR

QUALITATIVE DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Four, I present qualitative data which I collected by means of face-to-face interviews from ten Black girl learners who head households in the Xhariep District. The discussion of the findings is structured according to the main categories that guided the setting of the interview protocol. The findings from the interviews are presented in a synthesized manner and the participants will be identified according to the following key:

- For one-on-one interviews, participants and their schools were identified by means of numbers (*cf.* Appendix E).
- For clarification and motivation purposes cross-referencing to row numbers that appear in the verbatim transcripts (*cf.* Appendix E) is used in the discussion of the findings.

4.2 BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This section will look at a brief biography of the participants so as to provide some information on the background of the participants.

- Participant 1 was 20 years old, staying with her young brother and sister. There are four in their family, two sisters and two brothers. She is the middle child and was 8 years old when her parents passed away.
- Participant 2 was 16 years old, and stayed with her elder and younger sisters. There are three in their family, and she is the second-born. She was 15 years old when her parents passed away. The mother was 46 years old at that time, but the age at which the father passed away is not known to her.
- Participant 3 was 19 years old and stayed with her younger brother. They are four in the family, 3 brothers and her. She is the second-born child in the family. She does not

know how old her mother was when she passed away, and does not know her father at all.

- Participant 4 was 16 years old, and stayed with her younger sister. There are 2 boys and 4 girls in their family. She is the second born child in the family. She was 7 years old when her parents passed away.
- Participant 5 was 22 years old and stayed with her other two sisters in the family, of which she is the middle-born child. She was 10 years old when her mother who was 40 years old, passed away. Their father is not known to them.
- Participant 6 was 17 years old and stayed at home with her three other sisters. She is the last-born in the family. She was 7 years old when her parents passed on.
- Participant 7 was 20 years old, staying alone at home. She is the only child, and was 11 years old when her mother died. The mother was 31 years old. She does not know her father.
- Participant 8 was 19 years old, and staying with three other siblings. She is the last-born in the family and was 6 years' old when her mother passed away at 38 years. She does not know when her father passed away.
- Participant 9 was 18 years old and stayed with her younger two siblings. There are three in the family, and she is the oldest child. Her father is still alive, but has abandoned them and her mother left them to seek a job.
- Participant 10 was 19 years old and stayed with her younger brother. They are two in the family. She was 15 years old when her mother passed away, and she does not know when her father passed away.

The background information indicated that all the participants had been heading households with a number of siblings for quite some time.

4.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE INTERVIEW DATA

In this section, the main themes that were identified from the verbatim transcripts of the interview data will be highlighted. The discussion below is structured according to the topics in the interview protocol:

- Basic needs
- Factors impacting on school performance
- Attention
- Perceptions about school
- Lack of food/Malnutrition
- Responsibilities
- Academic goals
- Social relationships
- Coping strategies
- General issues

4.3.1 Basic needs

Who assists you with your everyday needs such as food, clothes and school fees? Do you have enough? What do you do if you do not have enough money for food and clothes?

Responses to this question indicated that all ten participants are assisted by a family member or relative for needs such as food, electricity and cosmetics (cf. 3, 88, 235, 365, 509, 576, 642, 648-649, 715, 789, 790, 873).

One participant indicated that they sometimes borrow from people and return what they borrowed at the end of the month (*cf.* 584), while another one indicated that they are struggling and they just ask necessities from people (*cf.* 514-516). One response indicated that assistance is provided by means of a social grant (*cf.* 355). Furthermore, the responses indicated that the participants are assisted by grandparents, friends, community members and family members if they do not have enough basic necessities for the month (*cf.* 176-178, 365, 513, 794).

Who normally assists you with your school work?

Most of the participants, according to the data, rely on themselves to complete their school work, which indicates a high degree of independence (*cf.* 12, 116, 368, 653, 718, 796) while some get assistance from family members (*cf.* 587-588, 881, 888); neighbours (*cf.* 13, 721-722), and other people (*cf.* 516). One participant indicated that she gets assistance from her boyfriend (*cf.* 238).

Do you sometimes experience problems with school work? What causes that?

All ten participants revealed that they, at times, experience problems with their school work (*cf.* 16, 119, 243, 371, 520, 591-592, 655-656, 719-721, 798, 821) for different reasons such as not understanding subjects (*cf.* 606-607, 735, 821), anger due to being hungry (*cf.* 248, 251), isolation from classmates (*cf.* 119-120) and one felt that she is not liked by her school mates (*cf.* 81,82).

What do you do when you experience problems with your school work?

It emerged from participant's responses that when they experience problems with their school work, they share their problems with friends and other children (*cf.* 245, 885), neighbours (*cf.* 721-722), other people (*cf.* 591), other learners (*cf.* 656). Two of the participants indicated that they go to the library for assistance (*cf.* 368, 656).

Discussion

Three main themes emerged from the data obtained from the responses related to basic needs. The responses indicated that the participants have a number of **personal support structures** that support them with their needs for basic resources. It emerged from the data that family members (sisters, brothers, aunts, grandmothers) mainly support the girl learner from child-headed families (*cf.* 3, 88, 235, 365, 509, 576, 642, 715, 715, 789, 790, 813). The following was revealed in the exact words of the participants: *"it was my brother", "ask our older sister to assist", "it is our aunts", "my sister assists me with food"*. This links well with what Newell (2008:7) (*cf.* 2.2.4.8) indicates that: siblings are taking care to provide for child-headed families school fees and day-to-day care. In addition to this, it was also revealed that governmental support structures provide for everyday needs (*cf.* 355-356), which is in line with literature that indicates that **government structures** such as social grants support learners from child-headed families (*cf.* Sloth-Nielsen, 2004:27 (*cf.* 2.2.2)). Furthermore, the participants reported that **friends, the community, neighbours and other children** (*cf.* 13-14, 176, 178, 365, 513, 516, 584, 800, 812, 814) play an important role in assisting with school resources: *"assistance from our next door neighbour", "I have friends, they give me something"*. Although it appears that there are relatives who are willing to assist, sometimes these learners from child-headed households stay without assistance, as reported in one of the responses: *"We are helped by our relatives but sometimes we just stay as we are because we are afraid to ask"* (*cf.* 648 – 649).

A second theme that emerged was the **causes of school-related problems** such as not understanding subjects (*cf.* 607, 735), anger due to hunger (*cf.* 248, 251), isolation from classmates (*cf.* 119-120) and one girl felt that she is not liked by her school mates (*cf.* 81,82). The issue of not being liked by other learners links well with discrimination as one of the effects of child-headed households (Woolfolk, 2004:167) (*cf.* 2.4.2).

When looking into challenges with which learners from child-headed households can be faced, as they reported during interviews, learning might be impossible when they do not

have food which is a basic need (Cotton, 1995:59) (*cf.* 2.5.1). This means that their functioning might be impaired which could lead to a decline in scholastic performance (Calitz, 2001:30) (*cf.* 2.5.1).

4.3.2 Factors impacting on school performance

Do you regularly attend school?

What transpired from the responses is very positive. Some of the participants try their utmost to be at school, except when they are not well health-wise (*cf.* 385-386, 890-891). Some indicated that they do not attend regularly due to food being unavailable (*cf.* 815) or being hurt by family problems (*cf.* 268-270). Irregular attendance was only detected among three participants (*cf.* 268, 728, 815) (*cf.* 2.5.1).

Have you ever failed, how many times, which grade? What do you think could be the reason?

The responses revealed that many of the participants have failed once or twice during their school career (*cf.* 24, 277, 388, 604, 733, 818). The reasons that they mention differ: one participant indicated that she was running after friends (*cf.* 279), another one fell pregnant (*cf.* 665-666) while others failed due to poor academic performance (*cf.* 606, 735). Sadly, one participant indicated that she failed because her mother died and she was left with her grandmother who also died later on (*cf.* 393-394). Two participants reported that they were hospitalized for some time as they were badly injured unintentionally by other children when playing and could not attend school; hence they failed (*cf.* 151-152, 531-532). Three participants reported that they repeated a class due to poor academic achievement (*cf.* 26-27, 427).

Discussion

The major themes that emerged from the data relate to **the factors affecting regular school attendance** and the **quality of academic performance**. One of the overwhelming responses revealed by most participants is that schooling is challenging (*cf.* 20, 128, 376,

594, 803) due to different reasons. They have difficulties related to subject matter and their basic needs to attend school are not fulfilled. This situation makes them feel isolated (cf. 119-120). One participant emotionally said "I don't have a school jersey and those who do not wear school jerseys are not allowed to come to school" (cf. 805-807). "I explained that I am struggling, I am moving around asking but he did not understand" (cf. 808-809). These responses are in line with what Calitz (2001:26) indicated, namely that children from child-headed households struggle with school resources and are often discriminated against (German, 2006:148-149) (cf. 2.4.1).

Another participant indicated that the school is challenging due to her being an orphan: "It's challenging especially when you do not have someone to lean on like parents" (cf. 376-378). It is indicated in the literature that the involvement of parents in their child's academic life plays an important role (Calitz, 2001:17) (cf. 2.6.10). Although the life of learners who head households is not easy, it is remarkable that some of the participants still find schooling "nice" and "interesting" (cf. 258, 888, 523, 725). Normally, according to the literature, the learners have the tendency to drop out when life becomes more difficult (cf. Woolfolk, 2004:158) (cf. 2.6.11). It appears that although the participants lack basic needs and safety needs that they do not exhibit feelings of helplessness that could hamper their performance, as indicate Eloff and Ebersohn (2004:71) (cf. 2.6.7).

Emotions are provoked by death of parents, lack of respect and being discriminated against, and the need to be loved and to belong causes emotions that affect cognition. When the cognitive system is affected, learning will definitely be affected together with important cognitive skills such as creativity and reasoning (Eloff & Ebersohn 2004:34) (cf. 2.6.8). The responses of the participants point to the fact that they need to be loved and to belong, which could result in ineffective cognitive development that could hamper their learning success.

4.3.3 Attention

Do you at times find it difficult to concentrate at school? What do you think could be the reason?

Participants indicated that their concentration in class gets disturbed at times (*cf.* 182, 255, 290, 399, 535-536, 672, 748-749, 828, 896) due to the kind of life they are living (*cf.* 674-675, 828). Some indicated that it is difficult to concentrate at school, due to unavailability of food (*cf.* 251-252), family problems and the death of parents (*cf.* 32, 33, 163-164, 401-405) and not having money for school tours (*cf.* 535-537). One participant's response indicated that her attention and concentration is affected when she dreams of the perpetrators who raped her (*cf.* 157-158).

Discussion

The main theme that could be deduced from the responses is the **factors that affect concentration in the classroom**. It is sad to realize that participants report that the kind of life they are going through affects their concentration due to issues such as food unavailability, financial problems (*cf.* 535-537), family problems such as "*thinking that if my mother was still alive it wouldn't be like this*" (*cf.* 32-33) and trauma from rape (*cf.* 157-158). The literature highlights the negative effects of the unavailability of food as a basic need on the ability to concentrate, which appears to be true for the participants who took part in the study (*cf.* Richter & Desmond, 2008:1028; Arnab & Serumaga-Zake, 2006:221) (*cf.* 2.1; 2.5.1). It is indicated in the literature that financial problems and food unavailability distracts attention and concentration gets disturbed during in school activities, which makes effective learning difficult (Arends, 2009:142; Cotton, 1995:59) (*cf.* 2.5.1).

4.3.4 Perceptions about school

How do you find school - interesting, challenging or boring? Why challenging or boring?

Responses to this question indicated that, although some of the participants find schooling interesting, enjoyable and nice (cf. 258, 523, 725, 888), some find schooling very challenging (cf. 20, 128, 376, 594, 803). The reasons that the participants indicated for finding school challenging varied. One indicated that it is due to not having parents (cf. 376-378), one indicated that she is struggling with school clothes (cf. 805-807); having stress (cf. 128, 131) and having problems with the curriculum itself (cf. 20, 134). One participant indicated that she is actually bored with school (cf. 659).

Discussion

The main themes that were derived from the responses of the participants were: **factors causing problems with school and concentration** and **attitudes towards school**. One of the overwhelming responses revealed by most of the participants is that schooling is challenging (cf. 18, 128, 376, 594, 803), due to different reasons: *"it is challenging especially when you do not have someone to lean on like parents"*, *"things we do at school are challenging"*, *"I have a lot of stress"*. They reported difficulties with regard to subject matter and of school needs not being met (cf. 19-20, 128, 131). Another participant indicated that the challenge is due to being an orphan: *"It's challenging especially when you do not have someone to lean on like parents"* (cf. 376-378). Literature highlights the fact that when parents are never present in their children's school life, it becomes difficult for children to perform well (cf. Calitz, 2001:17; Magdol et al., 1992:7) (cf. 2.6.7; 2.6.10). Although the life of child-headed households learners is not easy, it is remarkable that some still find schooling nice and interesting (cf. 258, 888, 523, 723). This is a finding that contradicts the literature which indicated that learners from child-headed households have a tendency of dropping out from school (Martinus, 2009:302; Mokoena, 2007:62; Woolfolk, 2004:158) (cf. 2.4.6; 2.6.11).

Schooling might be challenging for these learners due to feelings of insecurity linked to the absence of parents (*cf.* Calitz, 2005:19; Donald *et al.*, 2004:244, 266) (*cf.* 2.5.2).

4.3.5 Lack of food/malnutrition

Do you ever go to school without food? Why and how often?

Out of ten participants only two indicated that they always have something to eat when going to school (*cf.* 613, 682). All the other participants indicated that they normally go to school without food (*cf.* 43, 172, 409, 540, 741-743, 832, 836, 899), as the food that they have is used up very quickly. The period learners go without food, is once a week (*cf.* 542, 743), twice a week (*cf.* 901), thrice a week (*cf.* 287, 837), a week (*cf.* 45, 174) and from mid-month until the end of the month (*cf.* 411-412).

How does going without food influence you?

According to the responses to this question, participants indicated that their classroom performance dropped as their studies got affected due to having to go to school without food (*cf.* 162-163, 291-292). They indicated that they just cannot concentrate at school when they are hungry (*cf.* 748-749): *"I don't concentrate in class", "I cannot listen to the teacher, my performance becomes bad"*. One participant reported that it is difficult to cope (*cf.* 545-546), while another reported and explained that she feels crazy (182- 183): she gets badly affected to an extent that she sometimes wants to leave school (*cf.* 97, 182-183). Some of the participants' responses indicated that they are assisted by the feeding scheme at school (*cf.* 179, 746, 903-907). It emerged from the responses that neighbours play an important role in assisting the girls who head households with food when they have nothing to eat (*cf.* 48, 420-421).

Discussion

One of the main themes which emerged during the interview was the **impact of a lack of food and the magnitude of food deprivation**. A lack of food among learners who head households is reported widely in the literature (Richter & Desmond, 2008:1023; Arnab &

Serumaga-Zake, 2006:221) (cf. 2.5.1; 2.1). Most of the participants reported that they do not have food from a day a week to numerous days a week, yet they are expected to be at school and functioning normally like other learners (cf. 8, 43, 45, 92, 172-174, 287, 409, 412, 542, 674-675, 743, 831-837, 901). It was sad and emotionally touching to hear one participant saying "If I did not eat the first day, I go to my relatives, the second day I do not go to school" (cf. 831-834).

Studies conducted both nationally and internationally regarding child-headed families indicated poverty as one of the challenges experienced by these children (cf. Alliance, 2009; Masondo, 2006:4; Mokoena, 2007:57-58)(cf. 1.1). Literature also indicates that learners who head households possess feelings of anger due to a lack of food (cf. Arnab & Serumaga-Zake, 2006:2, 3; Donald *et al.*, 2004:244, 266) (cf. 2.4.3). The lack of food could lead to them becoming vulnerable to abuse (cf. Richter & Desmond, 2008:1023-1024; Mokoena, 2007:57; German, 2006:149-158) (cf. 2.4.4; 2.5.1). All these arguments in the literature support the responses obtained from the participants who took part in the study, with the exception of being exploited or abused.

Safety needs, together with love and belonging needs can threaten the ability to learn (cf. 2.5.3). Leatham (2005:63) indicates that poverty strains the physiological and psychological being of a person because the ability to cope is weakened (cf. 2.4.7). This means that it will be difficult to progress academically, as learning is impossible when one is hungry (Calitz, 2001:301) (cf. 2.5.1). It is further indicated that poverty results in health risks which further result in learning barriers (cf. Leatham, 2005:63; Donald *et al.*, 2004:205) (cf. 2.4.10; 2.6.11).

4.3.6 Responsibilities

What are your responsibilities at home?

Responses to this question indicated that all ten participants have numerous responsibilities such as house chores in addition to their school work, such as cleaning the house and cooking (cf. 51-52, 185, 297, 548, 684, 840-841, 930-931) and taking care of

their siblings (cf. 51-52, 434-436, 548-549, 614-615, 683-685): *"cook, clean the house and look after my younger siblings"*, *"look after children, clean the house, cook, do washing"*, *"clean the house and look into my books"*, *"to clean the house and look after the younger siblings"*, *"is my books, cleaning the house"*, *"to clean the house and cook"*, *"to see that my younger siblings is clean"*.

Do you cope with all your responsibilities? How does this influence your time for schoolwork?

Although the responses to this question indicated that they do cope with their schoolwork irrespective of family responsibilities (cf. 54,188, 300, 441, 687, 754, 845, 937), one participant indicated that she gets disturbed in her school work as she sacrifices normal rest by not sleeping during the night so as to do her schoolwork (cf. 551-552). One of the participants indicated that their academic performance gets affected due to the many responsibilities (cf. 306).

Discussion

The major themes that I could identify from these responses were: **the nature of the responsibilities** that the girl learners have to carry and the **impact of the responsibilities** on their schoolwork. I discovered that the girls who head households are overburdened by different activities such as house chores, taking care of siblings and having to concentrate on their school work (cf. 51-52, 185, 297, 434-436, 541-543, 614-615, 684, 840-841, 930-931). These findings are in line with what is indicated in the literature (cf. 2.4.7), that learners who head households have many responsibilities to take care of because they do not have parents (Martinus, 2009:299; Newell, 2008:6). They spend most of their time playing a parental role (Moffet, 2007:58; Mokoena, 2007:49) (cf. 1.2.1; 1.1). For instance, participants responded with: *"to look after children, clean the house, cook, do washing and make sure that when they going to school they wear proper uniform"* (cf. 684-685) and *"I cook, clean the house, look after my younger siblings"* (cf. 930-931).

Having many responsibilities to take care of, including being a parent to your siblings, indicate that there might be a need to belong and this could affect the development of self-esteem for learners from child-headed households. When the self-esteem is not well established, these children will experience problems in their learning (cf. Woolfolk, 2004:353) (cf. 2.5.4). Furthermore, according to Arends (2009:143) and Woolfolk, (2004:353) (cf. 2.5.4) the many responsibilities might make learners more concerned with fulfilling the responsibilities than with learning.

4.3.7 Academic goals

What would you like to study further after completing your basic education? Do you think it is important to further your studies? Why?

The responses indicated that all the participants find it important to study further as they also indicated their different career choices (cf. 56, 59, 190-191, 308, 310-311, 447, 554, 557, 618, 620-621, 690, 692, 751, 847, 956, 956), except for one participant who feels that, although she has chosen a career to follow, it is not important for her to study further due to a lack of finances (cf. 196-199). These responses indicated that the participants, irrespective of their circumstances, still had academic goals and future plans which they wanted to fulfil, among others, being a social worker, nurse or engineer. The importance of studying was highlighted in other responses such as: "so as to get employed" (cf.59), "studies will assist me in life" (cf. 739-740), "I want to work and be able to do everything for myself" (cf. 310-311), "I will get work and have money to assist my siblings"(cf. 451), "so that I have a bright future" (cf. 557), "so that I can be someone in life" (cf. 849), "assist other children"(cf. 555), "to become someone in life" (cf. 849) and "I do not want to live in this situation I am in now" (cf. 709-710).

Discussion

From the responses, the following major themes emerged: **goal orientation, future plans** and **opinions regarding further studies**. Although girl learners from child-headed households seem to be overburdened by different responsibilities, they reported positive

hopes regarding academic goals. Their responses indicated that they want to be "nurses", "chartered accountants", "teachers", "engineers", "project managers", "police officers", "social workers" and "tailors" (cf. 56, 59, 191-192, 308-310, 447, 618, 620-621, 690, 692, 757, 847, 853, 958-959). Even though these learners might experience academic problems, they appear to be motivated and goal-oriented, as they have future plans and goals that they want to achieve. In contrast to what is indicated in literature by Al-Emadi (2007) (cf. 2.6.3), these learners appear to have a desire to succeed and to avoid failure. It is indicated in the literature that one's goals are determined by one's experiences (Bernard, 1972:49). (cf. 2.5.7). It could be that the negative experiences that these girls are faced with have motivated them to set positive goal for themselves that, on the other hand, could motivate them to better academic achievement (McMillan & Wergin, 2006:76 (cf. 2.6.6).

One participant appeared to have lost hope as she reported how difficult it is with her studies because she has a lot of stress. (cf. 129-131, 134-135). She further indicated that studying further is not important for her: "*I think for me I cannot get what I want, ——— at least getting a wage can assist, for other people who have money its important, they can go and study*" (cf. 196-199). This response is in line with the literature where it is indicated that a child-headed household can become a barrier to studying due to financial problems which lead to depression and losing hope (cf. 63; Leatham, 2005; Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:1; Mwamwenda, 2004:237) (cf. 2.4.7; 2.6.8; 2.6.9).

It is going to be difficult for learners from child-headed households to fulfil their dreams of studying further, as they might not reach the stage of self-actualization due to their basic physiological needs not being fulfilled (cf. 2.5.7).

4.3.8 Social relationships

Do you have friends at school and at home? Is it important to have friends?

Responses to this question indicated that the learners who head households are able to socialize as all ten participants reported that they have friendship relationships (cf. 61, 205,

313, 461, 624, 695, 765, 851, 958). They indicated that they find that friends play an important role in their lives, as the friends assist them with different things, such as food, advice and somebody with whom they can share their feelings (cf. 63, 208-209, 315-317, 464-465, 626, 697-698, 853-854): *"they assist you"*, *"you should share your problems with them"*, *"able to assist me when I have problems"*, *"you can share things that bothers you and you feel better thereafter"*, *"at times they give you advice"*, *"if you are stressed sometimes you can talk to her and get better"*, *"assist each other with our school work"*.

Do you take part in school activities such as sport?

Most participants responded positively to this question as they indicated that they participate in different school activities, such as playing soccer and netball (cf. 213, 319, 629, 700, 966). One participant indicated that she is not participating because she has a lot of work to do: from schoolwork, house chores, to taking care of siblings (cf. 471-472). Some of the participants indicated that they do not participate in school activities due to being shy (cf. 771-774) or being too old for some of the sport teams (cf. 858).

Discussion

The main themes derived from the above were: the **nature of social interaction**, the **support structures for coping with difficult times** and the **role that friendship plays**. It emerged from the responses that the girl learners who head households appear not to be withdrawn and not accepted by others (Kanyamurwa & Ampek, 2007:72 (cf. 2.4.1). They reported that it is important to have friends, as they assist them when they are in need of things like food, soap and advice (cf. 63, 208-209, 313, 461, 624, 694, 765, 851, 958). They do participate in sport activities (cf. 213, 319, 629, 700, 966). The advantage of socializing is that learning is enhanced even for those who might feel it is too heavy. They can forget about problems for a while (cf. 2.5.5).

Due to many responsibilities (cf. 51-52, 185, 297, 434-436, 548, 614-615, 684, 840-841, 930-931), it might happen that the learners are unable to participate in school activities which is in line with the literature that indicates that learners who head households have

many responsibilities to bear (Newell, 2008:6) (cf. 2.4.8) due to the unavailability of parents. The unavailability of parents becomes a shortcoming as there is no assistance or support that could allow these learners some time to socialize (Arends, 2009:142 (cf. 2.5.2). A lack of socialization impacts directly on cognitive development (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:40), which could contribute to the fact that some of the girls who head households might never be able to realize their talents and full potential, and learning will remain challenging to them (Woolfolk, 2004:435) (cf. 2.5.7).

4.3.9 Coping strategies

Who helps you to cope during difficult times? What kind of support do you get?

Responses to this question indicated that some participants do not share their problems with anybody, but prefer to sleep (cf. 861), cry (cf. 140, 477), write poems (cf. 216-217) or keep the problems as secrets within themselves (cf. 67, 679). Some of the responses indicated that family members and relatives such as sisters and aunts, as well as neighbours, assist the girls by giving them advice and telling them what to do when there is something troubling them (cf. 632, 777-779).

It again appeared from the data that friends play a role in assisting during difficult times, as the girls indicated that friends comfort them (cf. 265-266, 321, 566, 569): "*when I have problems I share with friends*", "*she tells me not to stress, things will be fine*".

Discussion

The main theme that I extracted from the responses is **the support structures to cope with problems/difficulties**. It is good to realize that participants are able to share their problems with friends, neighbours and family members when there is something bothering or depressing them (cf. 67, 265-266, 321, 477, 566, 632, 777, 779, 973) although they keep feelings to themselves most of the time: "*Its my sister, we are close to each other, I normally tell her and we both cryget better after that pain*" (cf. 477). This is good, to avoid them falling prey so that they cannot fall prey to helplessness (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:71) (cf. 2.6.7). The responses obtained confirm what the literature reveals, namely

that family members play a role in alleviating the emotional needs of learners who head households (cf. Leatham, 2005:68) (cf. 2.6.10). Some participants also mentioned friends and neighbours assisting them during difficult times (cf. 46-48, 321, 564, 980). In summary, it appears that the community, relatives and friends provide a strong support structure to the girl learners who head households (cf. 48, 71, 142, 224, 235, 245, 265, 313, 315, 324-325, 365, 422, 477, 513, 566, 584, 591, 626-627, 632, 649, 697, 715, 768, 777, 784, 789, 800, 873, 942, 973).

It is sad that some participants reported that they "keep things to themselves", and rather "cry" or "sleep" as coping strategies (cf. 140-141, 217, 678, 700-720, 861), which indicates that these learners might be lonely and withdrawn (cf. Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:401) (cf. 2.5.5).

The unfulfilled need of being loved and to belong together with insufficient safety strategies is evident when learners indicate that they are unable to share their emotions, which could distract learning (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010:367; Donald *et al.*, 2004:244, 266) (cf. 2.5.2).

Responses also indicated that the learners feel insecure because of the bad treatment they receive from some people, to an extent that they end up being emotional and then their learning is affected (cf. 81-82, 402-405, 498-500) (cf. Leatham, 2005:71-72). Cotton (1995:60) indicates that love assists learners to learn successfully (cf. 2.5.3), but one deduces from their responses that they are emotionally affected which could impact on their not being successful in their learning (Donald *et al.*, 2004:244, 266) (cf. 2.5.2).

4.3.10 General issues

Is there anything you would love to share with me in relation to your studies or life at home?

Participants had different stories to share about their lives. What emerged from the data is that one participant was suicidal, due to anger (cf. 330) and some struggle a lot; due to the absence of parents (cf. 864-868). One participant indicated that she is about to lose her

shelter as her aunts want them to vacate the house they are living in now (cf. 498-500). Another response indicated that the participant is troubled and hurt by other children at school who usually tell her that she is "ugly" (cf. 81- 82). One participant shared with me that she is dating a boyfriend who "seems to be loving and caring" (cf. 224-225, 230-231), and another participant indicated that she is "hoping to get a bursary to study further" (cf. 708-709).

Discussion

What transpired from the interviews are the feelings of the participants about the kind of life they are living. They reported how much they hurt, that they are uncertain about what will happen to them and about their future . One participant even reported to be suicidal, which is quite disturbing (cf. 351).

One of the responses was "*We have many problems at home that we are unable to solve so when I feel hurt ... I do not come to school*" (cf. 268-271). It was reported that these kinds of feelings are caused by things like "*not having soap to wash clothes* " (cf. 272-274). This is in line with what appeared in the literature, that there are many things that might prevent learners from child-headed families to attend school regularly (cf. Moffet, 2007:85; Mokoena, 2007:62; Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:411) (cf. 2.3.2; 2.6.4).

A new dimension that emerged from the data is the fact that one learner indicated being suicidal and having attempted it. Another event which is also touching and which emerged from the responses is that of losing shelter (cf. 500) which is also reported in the literature as one of the life challenges faced by learners who head households (cf. France, 2006; Leatham, 2005:71-72) (cf. 2.5.3).

From what was shared generally by participants who head household, namely for example how they are hurt, their uncertainty about their future and feelings of committing suicide, it is clear that their self-actualization might be problematic.

Based on the interview responses, I summarize the major effects of child-headed households experienced by the learners who took part in the study, and verify my main findings against the literature review.

4.4 THE MAJOR EFFECTS EMANATING FROM THE NEEDS EXPERIENCED BY THE GIRL LEARNERS WHO HEAD HOUSEHOLDS

The following were the major effects identified from the interviews.

In line with the literature, signs of **stigmatization** and **discrimination** (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:411; German, 2006:148) (cf. 2.4.1; 2.4.2) were detected in the responses of the learner who indicated that her peers find her ugly (cf. 81-82), the one who was discriminated against for not having a school jersey (cf. 805-809) or the response that indicated: "*some friends think bad about you when you do not have enough food*" (cf. 963-964) or friends "*talk bad things*" that ultimately influenced the learners who head households not to take part in school activities. In this regard signs of **isolation** and loneliness were also detected among the participants. It appeared as if some of the participants rather keep their problems to themselves and do not share them with other people. In support of this argument, responses such as: "*I don't share with anyone*" (cf. 36) or not telling anyone (cf. 67), "*I just sit there alone*" (cf. 114, 165), "*I do it myself*" (cf.114, 164), "*sit there in the corner and cry*" (cf. 216-217), and "*There is nobody, I normally just sleep*" (cf. 861) were obtained.

The literature indicated **abuse** (German, 2006:149) (cf. 2.4.4) as one of the effects of child-headed households. One of the participants reported to have been raped after the death of her parents, which really affects her concentration in class (cf. 157-158).

Psycho-social problems (Leatham, 2005:63) (cf. 2.4.7) were also detected as an effect of heading a household (cf. 131, 536-537, 921-922): "*I have a lot of stress*", "*I do not have money*", "*what am I going to eat after school*". A number of participants indicated that their concentration gets affected in class (182, 255, 290, 399, 536, 672, 748-749, 828, 896)

and they also experience stress and are emotional due to the death of their parents (*cf.* 128-131; 568) and having to cope with learner pregnancy (*cf.* 485, 666-668).

In correspondence with the literature, **poverty** was also detected among the participants of the study (*cf.* 8, 43, 45, 92, 172-174, 251-252, 287, 647, 831-837, 901) (Richter & Desmond, 2008:1023-1024) (*cf.* 2.4.10). They indicated that they go to school without food for several days, varying from once a week to two weeks in a month (*cf.* 45, 174, 287, 542, 743, 901, 411-412) and because of the lack of food, their classroom performance drops (*cf.* 291-292, 437).

In the case of **violence** (Donald *et al.*, 2004:244-266) (*cf.* 2.4.3) only one participant indicated that fighting with her siblings escalates to such an extent that she, at times, feels like committing suicide and that she has left the house to stay somewhere else (*cf.* 329-330, 344-345).

It emerged from the responses that learners, in line with the literature, have many **responsibilities** (Newell, 2008:6; Roby & Cochran, 2007:20) (*cf.* 2.3; 2.4.8) concerning taking care of their siblings, house chores and their studies all of which affect their academic performance (*cf.* 16, 24, 27, 243, 277, 305, 388, 520, 551, 604, 687-688, 733, 818, 798, 799), and they end up sacrificing nights to do schoolwork (*cf.* 551-552).

From the responses of the participants it could be concluded that they are not exposed to child-labour and involved in criminal activities which are indicated as possible effects of child-headed households in the literature (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409; Mokoena, 2007:59) (*cf.* 2.4.5; 2.4.9).

Linked to the negative effects is the absence of need fulfilment. In the next section, I highlight the absence of need fulfilment among the girl learners who took part in the study.

4.5 THE MAJOR NEEDS OF THE GIRL LEARNERS WHO HEAD HOUSEHOLDS

The following major needs were identified from the responses of the participants. Physiological needs (*cf.* 8, 406-407, 498-500, 739-743), safety needs (*cf.* 393-395, 650),

love and belonging needs (*cf.* 32-33, 119-120, 393-395, 598-601), and esteem needs (*cf.* 81-82, 119, 963-964). Participants indicated that unavailability of food (**as a basic physiological need**) (*cf.* 2.5.1) impacts on their learning as it becomes difficult to concentrate and pay attention when hungry (*cf.* 182, 255, 290, 399, 535, 672, 748-749, 828, 896). It emerged from the data that the death of parents affected their **security** and **love and belonging** (*cf.* 2.5.2; 2.5.3) which had a negative impact on their learning (*cf.* 32, 33, 163-164, 401-405, 545-546). Responses indicated that one participant is about to lose her shelter (*cf.* 498-502). Both the basic need and the security needs are lacking among the participants who took part in the study. The study also identified that **esteem needs** due to discrimination and stigmatization are not met, as participants felt disrespected when they are called "ugly" (*cf.* 81,82), or when it is said that they are not liked (*cf.* 119-120) and when friends talk bad about them (*cf.* 963-964).

What is surprising and in contrast with what the literature reveals, is that the lack of basic needs appear not to impact on the participants' need to gain knowledge and to drop-out of school (Martinus, 2009:302; Masondo, 2006:4) but to further their studies for a career (*cf.* 2.4.8; 4.2.7).

Linked to the needs identified above, I present the major learning challenges that emanated from the needs experienced by the participants. The responses received from the participants corresponded well with many of the findings in the literature regarding the general learning challenges that could be faced by learners who head households.

4.6 THE MAJOR LEARNING CHALLENGES EMANATING FROM THE NEEDS AND EFFECTS OF HEADING HOUSEHOLDS

Based on the identified needs and the effects of heading a household, the following learning challenges emerged.

Absence of expectations (*cf.* 2.6.1): From the learner responses I inferred that due to the absence of parents, the participants who took part in the study would be at a disadvantage. Parental expectations, peer group expectations and self expectations, all have a

determining factor towards academic achievement, whether positive or negative (Calitz, 2001:57) (cf. 2.6.1). For the learner from a child-headed family where the parent is not available, and social involvement might be limited due to numerous responsibilities at home and at school that have to be taken care of, it might happen that they never experience it that somebody sets expectations for them and encourage them to realize the expectations.

Irregular school attendance (cf. 2.6.4): Learners do not attend school regularly when they do not have food so they miss out what is done at school (cf. 268, 728, 815). Their health status also impacts on their learning, as they are unable to attend school when ill (cf. 385-386, 890-891). The direct link between the absence of basic needs and attending school and paying attention is clear. The situation of the participants is not different than what the literature indicates, namely that a lack of physiological needs influence school attendance (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:41, Mokoena, 2007:2; Goffman, 2003) (cf. 2.6.4)

Lack of self-regulation (cf.2.6.5): The participants experienced unsatisfactory academic performance (cf. 16, 24, 27, 243, 277, 388, 427, 520, 551, 604, 733, 818) which leads me to conclude that they might lack the skill to reflect on their responsibilities and plan amidst the full schedule of duties that they have to complete (Newell, 2008:7) (cf. 2.6.2).

Attributions (cf. 2.6.7): It was noteworthy to note that the participants, in contrast with the literature appeared not to be helpless and to have lost hope completely due to their circumstances and unsatisfactory performance (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:71) (cf. 2.4.7). On the contrary, they appeared to be motivated because all of them had hopes, goals and dreams for future careers (cf. 56, 59, 190-191, 308-310, 447, 618, 690, 751, 847, 853, 958-959). In addition to this, and in contrast with the literature, there was not indication of dropping out of school or entering into early marriage to alleviate poverty (Martinus, 2009:302; Mokoena, 2007:59) (cf. 2.4.5).

Problematic cognitive development (cf. 2.6.8): The fact that some of the learners indicated angry emotions due to hurt feelings and stress (cf. 131, 329-320) related to their circumstances, can imply that their cognitive system, reasoning skills and decision-making

skills become affected (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:34) (cf. 2.6.8). Learners indicated that they do not understand some subjects and have repeated grades (cf. 605, 607, 733, 735, 798, 818). The latter response could be linked to what the literature reveals, namely that learners who head households and experience the need to love and belong, might be less likely to seek knowledge. To them it will be more important to search for friends (Arends, 2009:143) (cf. 2.5.2). They appear to be more concerned with security than with learning (Woolfolk, 2004:353) (cf. 2.5.4). According to the literature, cognitive development is also enhanced through social involvement (Eloff & Ebersohn (2004:401) (cf. 2.6.8). This aspect did not appear to be problematic among the participants, as they all reported that they had friends who they share their feelings with, or take part in activities at school (cf. 205, 465, 566, 568, 627, 851, 966).

School attendance (cf. 2.6.10): The participants' motivation to attend to school work is affected by unavailability of food and the emotional stress they experience due to the death of their parents (cf. 181-183, 260-263, 290-292). It is difficult for them to pay attention to school work when being hungry. This challenge is in line with the viewpoint of Eggen and Kauchak (2010:291) (cf. 2.6.4) who indicate that coping in the classroom becomes problematic for a learner who heads a household due to being preoccupied with family issues.

Lack of parental involvement (cf. 2.6.10): It appeared from the data that when parents are absent from the lives of learners, learning is difficult, as there is no-one to give guidance and assistance (cf. 376-377). Learners who headed households do not have parents who take care of responsibilities such as protection and support; who (as primary care-givers) play an important role in physical, social and emotional development; who assist in preventing problems that learners may experience at school. Their safety needs are thus affected (cf. 2.5.3). In the absence of safety needs being fulfilled, Calitz (2001:19) (cf. 2.5.2) argues that it is unlikely for academic performance to be favourable and their motivation levels to be high (Leatham, 2005:105) (cf. 2.5.3).

Socio-economic factors (*cf.* 2.6.11): Learners are affected socio-economically because they do not have enough money to provide for basic needs, to attend school regularly or to buy clothes (*cf.* 9, 38, 39, 91, 92, 174, 251-252, 287, 406-407, 411-412, 541-542, 647, 741, 836-837, 901). The lack of money to secure basic needs, impacts on the ability to pay attention, level of motivation, ability to concentrate and feelings of self-esteem (Arends, 2009:142, 143; Richter & Desmond, 2008:1023; German, 2006:148-149) (*cf.* 2.5.1; 2.5.4). In line with the literature, the participants in the study also come from poor socio-economic situations and experience financial problems, pain, hunger and education failure (*cf.* Mokoena, 2007:59; Masondo, 2006:4) (*cf.* 2.2.2). Furthermore, the responses of the participants supported the literature which indicates that poverty leads to poor nutrition and unfavourable health conditions (Calitz, 2001:19) (*cf.* 2.5.3) which in turn lead to absenteeism (*cf.* Mokoena, 2007:2; Goffman, 2003) (*cf.* 2.6.4; 2.3.8).

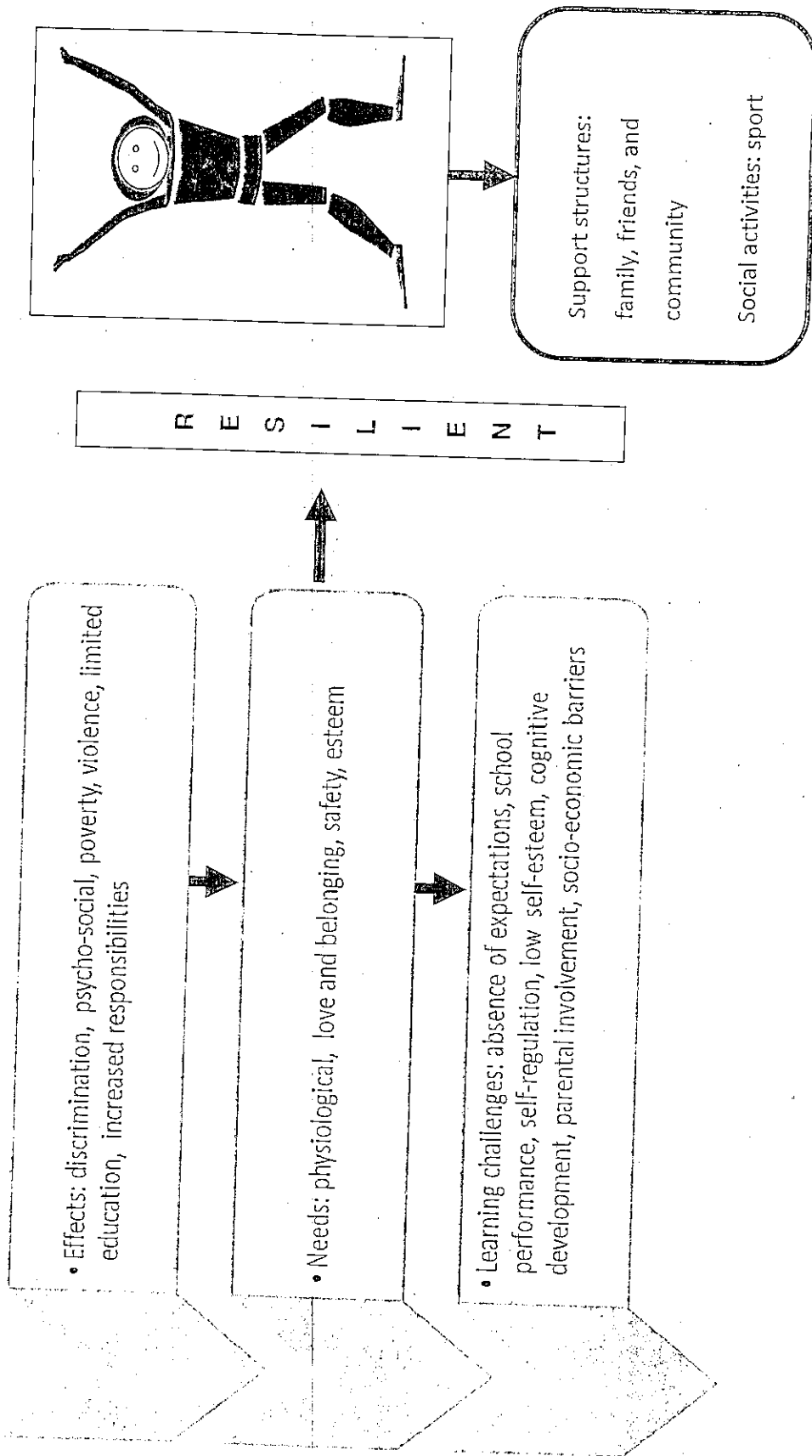
A finding that is not supported by the literature is the fact that the girl learners could possibly be regarded as **resilient**, despite the adversity that they are faced with (Rutter, 2007:205-209). The girl learners appeared to cope with their circumstances and even set goals for future careers (*cf.* 4.3.7). In the context of the study it seems as if the strong support structure provided by the community, relatives and friends (*cf.* 48, 71, 142, 224, 235, 245, 265, 313, 315, 324-325, 365, 422, 477, 513, 566, 584, 591, 626-627, 632, 649, 697, 715, 768, 777, 784, 789, 800, 873, 943, 973), as well as their participation in sport activities where they get the opportunity to socialize with their peers (*cf.* 213, 458, 629, 966), contributed to their resilience. The most recent research conceptualises resilience as a bi-directional or transactional process (Cameron, 2010, Theron & Theron, 2010:1-8) in which the individual negotiates with the ecology for support and the ecology reciprocates the efforts of the individual. Some researchers indicate a move of focus from "protective factors" to understanding "underlying protective processes" (Cameron, 2010). The ecology provides resources. In the literature these resources are sometimes referred to as protective factors or protective processes. It is clear from the responses of the participants that their ecology provides them with protective factors to face the challenges linked to being the head of a household.

Based on the previous discussion (*cf.* 4.4; 4.5; 4.6) I summarize the main findings related to the learning challenges experienced by the girl learners who took part in the study. It is important to note that the learning challenges, the needs experienced by the participants as well as the effects that emanate from the unmet need are inseparably linked. Chronologically seen, the negative effects of child-headed households create a number of unfulfilled needs that culminate into learning challenges for the learners.

Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the main findings of the study.



Figure 4.1: The learning challenges of Black girl learners who head households in the Xhariep District



4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In summarizing the findings of the research, it is clear that the girl learners who took part in the study are faced with numerous life challenges and circumstances that create learning challenges. The girls who participated in the study experienced health problems (*cf.* 385, 891), emotional problems (*cf.* 81-82, 140, 248, 492) and financial problems (*cf.* 91, 235, 511, 536-537, 730-731, 792-873) which impacted negatively on the academic performance of these learners (*cf.* 16, 119, 162-163, 243, 291-292, 371, 427-429, 545-546, 591, 592, 655, 748). The responses indicated that a number of the learners experience problems in understanding their school work and barriers to learning (*cf.* 4.2.1), some have failed already (*cf.* 4.2.2), they do not attend school regularly (*cf.* 4.2.3), have problems with concentration and attention (*cf.* 4.2.3), and their ability to cope is weakened (*cf.* 4.2.5).

What is encouraging from the responses is the fact that in spite of their unfavourable circumstances, the participants were positive about going to school and apparently have not considered dropping out (*cf.* 4.2.3), and have future plans to pursue a career (*cf.* 4.2.7). They also try and cope with their circumstances by sleeping, crying, writing poems, talking to family members for advice or keep the problems to themselves (*cf.* 4.2.9).