

CHAPTER TWO

CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND LEARNING CHALLENGES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The vulnerability of child-headed households starts long before the death of parents (Arnab & Serumaga-zake, 2006:221). By the time parents get ill and begin to be weak, children start to experience negative challenges from emotional distress, due to the fear of becoming destitute. They begin to take greater responsibilities such as generating income, searching for food and taking care of themselves and their siblings (Arnab & Serumaga-Zake, 2006:221). These children end up getting exposed to an increased risk of discrimination, exploitative child labour practice as they command lower wages, sexual exploitation, life in the streets and a further risk of contamination with HIV/ Aids (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:407 -411).

In this chapter, I explored general aspects related to the following issues:

- Child-headed households: a concept clarification
 - causes of child-headed households
 - the magnitude of child-headed households
 - the effects of child-headed households
- Child-headed households and needs fulfilment
- Learning challenges and child-headed households
 - expectations
 - self-esteem

- goal orientation
- regular school attendance
- self-regulation
- self-efficacy
- attributions
- cognitive development
- motivation
- parental involvement
- socio economic factors

2.2 CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS: A CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

2.2.1 Introduction

In South Africa, some households consist of "children only" (no adult at all) while some consist of children and the elderly. This is due to parental deaths from different causes. Orphan-hood prevalence almost doubled between 2000 and 2005 as indicated in Newell (2008:1), while the recent report by UNICEF (in Martinus, 2009:299-300) indicates between 143 and 210 million orphans worldwide and an estimated 14 million orphans due to Aids in Sub-Saharan Africa. This number is estimated to increase to 18 million in 2010. The number of orphans in South Africa was 1.49 million in 2008, as reported in recent South Africa statistics (Momborg, 2008). It is indicated further that about 2% of double orphans (without both parents) live in child-only households. These children are 18 years and younger (Newell, 2008:1).

2.2.2 Definition of child-headed households

Jefferson (in Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:408) and Kallman (2003:34) define child-headed households as households where both parents have died and the head of the household and primary income earner is below the age of eighteen years. Martinus (2009:299) defines child-headed households as those in which there is absence or permanent incapacity of the adult caregiver which has necessitated the taking over of responsibilities by children.

Child-headed families are vulnerable, especially those comprising of Aids orphans (Masondo, 2006:9). Learners who are heads of families drop out of school and hunt for jobs to secure employment in order to provide for the siblings (Moffet, 2007:85). Heads of child-headed families often face quite a range of issues, such as lack of survival needs and poverty. They often miss out on education and health care; need to cope with grief, stigmatization and discrimination (Alliance, 2009).

The most overwhelming and humiliating problems that are experienced by these learners from child-headed families are financial problems, hunger, educational failure, child labour, psychological problems, inadequate medical care and disruption of normal childhood development (Alliance, 2009; Mokoena, 2007:59; Masondo, 2006:4; Leatham, 2005:86-87).

Mwamwenda (2004:393) believes that educators' knowledge, personality and attitude can play a very important role in supporting learners who head households. Sloth-Nielsen (2004:27) argues that educators and social workers can offer assistance with regard to basic needs for children who head households, and that different grants are put in place at government level to cater for some of the basic needs.

The discussion above clearly links with the hierarchy of needs as indicated by Maslow in Clarkson (2006) and Woolfolk (2004:353). According to Maslow, basic or lower-order needs have to be fulfilled, in order for higher-order self-actualization needs to be satisfied (Arends, 2009:142). The lower, basic needs include the physiological needs (food, shelter

and clothing), the safety needs, the need for love and to belong and the need for self-esteem. From the above-mentioned discussion, I argue that children who head households, lack basic needs which in turn will influence the higher-order needs such as the need to acquire knowledge, the aesthetic need, and the need for self-actualization and finally the need for transcendence (Clarkson, 2006). In addition to this, due to being by themselves, without parents or an adult figure who can assist and motivate them with development and acquiring necessary skills, it can be argued that learners who head households might experience problems related to the fulfilment of the higher-order needs which include the need to acquire knowledge (*cf.* 2.5.5).

In the context of the study, I conceptualized child-headed households as families which are led by children below the age of 18 because of the permanent absence of parents or any adult guardian.

In the next section, I explore factors that lead to households becoming child-headed.

2.3 FACTORS THAT LEAD TO HOUSEHOLDS BECOMING CHILD-HEADED

One of the leading causes of child-headed households is the HIV and Aids pandemic that has taken the lives of many people in the world. Children are left as orphans, alone or with elderly people to take care of. Extended families are unable to act as caregivers due to increased stress related to poverty and a sense of despair resulting from HIV and Aids (Alliance, 2009; German, 2006:149-158). HIV and Aids affect household structures and their composition globally. A large number of child-headed families exist mostly because of Aids mortality (UNICEF in Newell, 2008:1).

It is assumed that if there is no intervention or change in behaviour by 2010, Aids-related deaths are expected to increase to 800 000 a year (Kallman, 2003:48). This brings along a great challenge to be faced, as an increased number of orphans, and an increase in households that are headed by children. In 2006, 40 million people were living with HIV and Aids worldwide of which 63% were living in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Africa during 2006,

12 million Aids orphans were counted (France, 2006). This implies that South Africa too is faced by a great challenge to deal with child-headed families.

Chronically sick parents are unable to support and take care of their families, so children are bound to play the major role as parents for the sake of the family (Roby & Cochran, 2007:20). According to Roby and Cochran (2007:20), children who head households have to take up the following responsibilities: they have to make sure that the house is clean; their siblings are clean; they have clothes; they have finances for their studies; that food is provided for everybody in the family; they take care of those that are ill in the house; arrange to obtain birth certificates for their siblings; they offer guidance to their siblings towards an acceptable lifestyle and make decisions on prioritizing how to spend money.

Low marriage rates also contribute largely to child-headed households because a single parent, usually the mother, is bound to leave children alone for job-seeking, which takes us to another cause of child-headed families, namely **mobility** (Newell, 2008:11). Parents normally move from one place to another searching for good jobs so as to feed their families. In the meantime, their children are left alone with older children facing the responsibility of heading the family. Women in South Africa seem to be the group of people who have been mostly affected by the labour migration of the apartheid era which contributed to the fact that most households are left without caregivers (Newell, 2008:11). Roby and Cochran (2007:20) indicate that about 12% of child-headed families, have come about due to abandonment by parents who leave children alone without anyone to take care of them, while the parents go to urban areas to seek jobs (Roby & Cochran, 2007:20).

I did not specifically focus on one of the causes of child-headed households in the context of my study, but selected learners who became heads of households due to any of the above-mentioned causes. In the following section I highlight the magnitude of child-headed households.

2.3.1 The magnitude of child-headed households

The UNAIDS study of 88 countries that was released in 2002 (in Kallman, 2003:34), observed that 13.4 million children under the age of 15 years in Africa, Asia and Latin America had lost parents due to Aids. It is expected that the number will increase to 25 million in 2010. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 12% of all children are orphans which are higher than in Asia and Latin America. The number of orphans is rapidly increasing in Sub-Saharan Africa due to Aids. For instance, South Africa is expected to have a 16% orphan rate, of which 70% will be due to Aids in 2010. It is noted that Aids produced more orphans in South Africa than in any other country (UNICEF in Martinus, 2009:299).

Large numbers of orphans imply large numbers of child-headed households (Kallman, 2003:34). Orphans live in poor socio-economic situations in Africa, especially in rural areas where there are large numbers of children who head households. In Botswana, as indicated by Arnab and Serumaga-Zake (2006:221), 15% of all children are orphans and 4,2% of these are household heads. In some areas about 37% of children are heads of households (Arnab & Serumaga-Zake, 2006:221). They are children who experience pain and hunger, lack proper education and have inadequate clothing (Leatham, 2005:61).

Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (ACCESS) stated in Nicholson and Jefferson (2008:409) that, in 2002, there were approximately 900 000 children under the age of 18 in South Africa who lost mothers. It is anticipated that the number will increase to three million by 2015. UNAIDS (in Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409) further indicates that 370 000 children under 18 years experienced the death of one parent in 2003 while there were 2.2 million orphans. The orphan population in South Africa is likely to rise from 9% to 12% by 2015 (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409).

It is also indicated that 82% of child-headed households consist of one or two children. There are more or less 11 500 households in South Africa that are headed by children that comprise of two or more children living without adults (Richter & Desmond, 2008:1024). The magnitude of child-headed households in the Xhariep District indicates that there are

about 2 663 orphans at different schools, of which 1 968 could possibly be heading families (cf. Appendix F).

In order to determine the learning challenges experienced by learners who head households, the effect of child-headed households on learners who head these households had to be investigated, as the negative effects culminate into needs which if not met, lead to challenges.

In the next section, I explore the effects of child-headed households on learners.

2.4 THE EFFECTS OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

It is normal for one to think that child-headed families are affected in only one way by the conditions in their households. In this section, different effects that heading a household can have on learners who head these households, are discussed.

2.4.1 Stigmatization

Children who head households experience different forms of stigmatization (Kanyamurwa & Ampek, 2007:72; Goffman, 2003:). They experience the pain of rejection by society because their parents are HIV-positive. Society does not accept them, they cannot play with their peers, and at school it is as if everybody is looking at them because their parents are HIV-positive (Kanyamurwa & Ampek, 2007:72; Goffman, 2003).

Most of the children who are orphans due to HIV and Aids have to deal with stigma attached to them long before the death and after the death of a parent who was HIV-positive. The stigma that was basically or initially attached to parents proceeds to descend to children. It takes away hope, friends, relatives and one's positive expectations for the future (France, 2006:3). Child-headed families feel that stigma will follow them for the rest of their lives, even accompany them into death (France, 2006). They are even referred to as "*aids orphans*", a concept emphasizing discrimination (German, 2006:148-149). A negative outflow of the stigmatization is that HIV and Aids victims become criminals and engage in violent activities (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409).

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, Masondo (2006:5) indicates that children who head households need coping strategies to deal with stigmatization and trauma due to the sickness of their parents who ultimately die.

2.4.2 Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as an unequal treatment meted out to a particular category of people (Woolfolk, 2004:167). Discrimination, especially gender discrimination, is another important factor that really affects child-headed families. Female children are often deprived of education due to child labour in order to avoid the family being stuck in poverty (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:411, 417). Children who head families, especially girls, are denied their school childhood. Their schooling is negatively affected and they are vulnerable to exploitation (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:411, 417). Children from child-headed households have feelings of fear and uneasiness emanating from discrimination at school due to HIV and Aids being associated with their families (Magdol, Moffit & Newman, 1992:2).

2.4.3 Violence

Heads of households may experience feelings of anger and frustration due to unsatisfied survival needs such as lack of food, clothes and basic health services which often result in criminal offence (Arnab & Serumaga-Zake, 2006:221-223). Often they are also affected by relationship violence between family members (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2004:244, 266).

2.4.4 Abuse

If child-headed households are not supported in one way or another by the people or their neighbours in the community, they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation due to poverty and other life needs (German, 2006:149-158). It is therefore easy for female children who head households to become sex workers so as to earn money for living and to support siblings (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:413; Mokoena, 2007:57). Furthermore, they also face physical as well as psycho-emotional abuse and are vulnerable to HIV-infection. Heads of

households are forced to seek jobs and work at an early age to overcome life challenges that they encounter (Roby & Cochran, 2007:19). Nicholson and Jefferson (2008:413) further indicate that due to loss of financial support from parents, children who head households could end up engaging in sex-trade and other unregulated labour force despite the child labour Act in South Africa (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:413). Children who are heads of households are vulnerable to abuse, prostitution and dealing with drugs just for making money for survival (Masondo, 2006:5).

2.4.5 Child labour

Children who head households are bound to perform household chores because there is no-one to lean on. They can be busy for four hours a week and work long hours for pay, so as to have something to eat (Gray, Van Niekerk, Struters, Violari, Martinson, McIntyre & Naidu, 2006: 25). Martinus (2009:302) asserts that heads of child-headed families find themselves bound to look for illegal employment (due to their age) so as to generate income for living, and they end up in jobs that offer low wages. In addition to their own household chores, girls from child-headed households seek jobs as housemaids so that they can get something to put on the table for their families (Mokoena, 2007:59).). Child labour increases as the economic conditions of children in HIV and Aids families deteriorate (Masondo, 2006:4). Poverty is the seed-bed of child labour, and poor conditions in the family force children to work for reasons of economic expediency. Child-labour is accommodated by employers for a cheap and flexible workforce, and girls especially are in demand for domestic services (Masondo, 2006:4).

2.4.6 Limited education

Richter and Machellan (in Martinus, 2009:302) state that, most of the time, the education of child-headed families is neglected, resulting in dropping-out of school. Mokoena (2007:62) indicates that there were more girls than boys who were not attending school out of an estimated 44 million children in South Africa in 2003. This means that the female learners from child-headed households are more disadvantaged and sacrifice their education, due to numerous responsibilities they are faced with as a result of this. Female heads of child-

headed families end up falling into a trap of entering into early marriage, trying to protect themselves from poverty (Martinus, 2009:302). Generally the girl child-head is the one who suffers from discrimination, stigmatization, prostitution, dropping out of school and early marriage (Martinus, 2009:302; Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:412, 417; Mokoena, 2007:62; Goffman, 2003).

2.4.7 Psycho-social problems

Unavailability and lack of parental guidance and affection affect children psychologically (Martinus, 2009:302). It becomes worse in child-headed households as these children are emotionally affected either by the conditions of their family due to HIV and Aids or by the loss of parents, which often result in unacceptable behaviour. Children from child-headed households also suffer from psycho-social problems resulting from a very long ill health status of the parent (Martinus, 2009:302). Mokoena (2007:60) states that psycho-social problems aggravate chronic stress and weaken the immune system. Leatham (2005:63) mentions that due to constant thinking of poverty and income and health conditions, children who head households are negatively affected, their psychological being affected and their ability to cope is weakened.

Studies by Moffet (2007:58) also found that the social functioning of learners who head households can become affected because the child-head spends most of the time taking responsibility for playing a parental role while s/he is not even well developed for that. Moffet (2007:58) indicates that parentification has been shown to be detrimental to child development.

2.4.8 Responsibilities

Due to orphanhood, care responsibilities such as making sure that there is food in the house, worrying about shelter for siblings, worrying about siblings' health and worrying about how to pay school fees are carried out by child-heads, usually the female child of different ages in different households (Newell, 2008:6). Hill (in Newell, 2008:7) indicates that there is a high proportion of all children that are responsible for their own day-to-day

care. In some households of child-headed families, one person is responsible for school fees, one for day-to-day care and one as household-head aided by community members or relatives. About 16% of double orphans as stipulated in Newell (2008:7), indicated their siblings as their caregivers, as the heads of household and being responsible for their school fees.

2.4.9 Crime

Crime is one of the factors that is most prevalent in child-headed families (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409), as these families are poverty-stricken, which leads them to resort to criminal behaviour to make ends meet. Children resort to crime so as to maintain themselves (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409). Some children from child-headed households abuse drugs so that they have the courage to engage in risky behaviour (Mokoena, 2007:57).

2.4.10 Poverty

In South Africa, poverty is severe and wide to an extent that about 28,5% estimated households lived on a low poverty line of R800.00 per month in 2000 (Donald *et al.*, 2004:201), which might be worse currently. Poverty adversely affects developing children, especially those that are from child-headed households.

Although there are government structures, such as social grants, put in place in South Africa to assist children, it is still too little to cover all the needs of child-headed households. In this regard, Richter and Desmond (2008:1023-1024) reported that 13% to 54% of children in child-headed households live on R400.00 per month, which is too little, especially when managed by the child. This is the time when young girls in child-headed families opt for early marriage or become sex workers for survival (Mokoena, 2007:57). Leatham (2005:86) emphasizes the fact that children who head households spend most of the time indoors to avoid exposure for not having money for food or clothing. These financial constraints often interfere with their schooling and academic progress (Leatham, 2005:86). Issues like poverty and general social exclusion are seen as factors which limit

future opportunities for children and their access to their rights, such as the right to have food (Sloth-Nielsen, 2004: 9).

I argue that, due to the numerous problems that learners who head households could experience, a number of unmet needs that can have a negative influence on their academic learning may arise. The next section will focus on the learner needs that could arise from the effects of child-headed households.

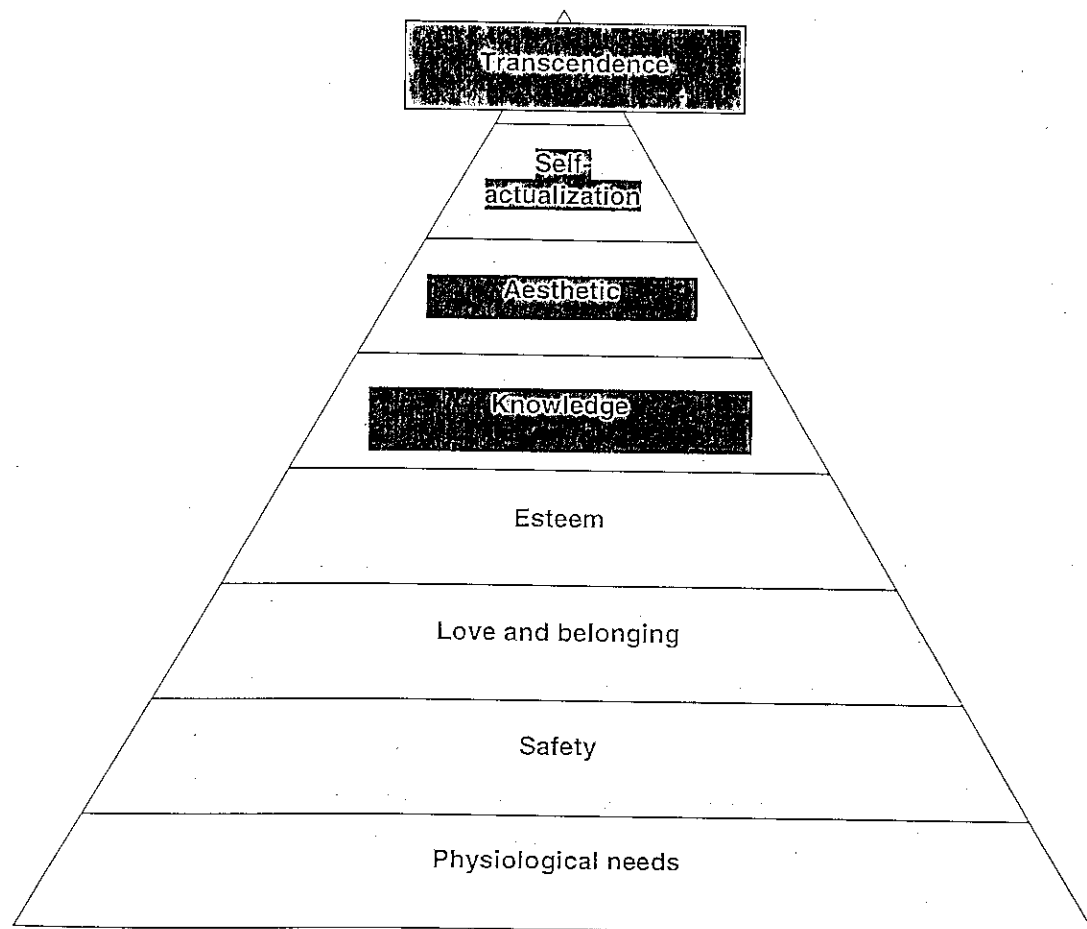
2.5 CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND NEEDS FULFILMENT

In the absence of parents, children who head households are faced with a number of unmet needs which could pose threats to their learning and development.

Abraham Maslow indicates that a child's development depends on different needs that must not be taken for granted as they allow the child to develop holistically (Arends, 2009:140). As much as development proceeds through different stages, Arends (2009:140) further states that the needs are also hierarchically ordered according to the basic needs that have to be met first. Maslow (in Cotton, 1995:58) indicates that before the human being's self-actualization can be reached, the preceding levels that refer to the physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, cognitive and aesthetic needs must first be fulfilled. He refers to the first four levels as the basic, **deficiency needs** and the last four levels as **growth or being needs** (Arends, 2009:142; Woolfolk, 2004:353).

In this section, I briefly discuss the hierarchy of needs according to Abraham Maslow (in Arends, 2009:142-143) and link the absence of need fulfilment in the lives of children who head households to learning challenges that could arise as a result. Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of the needs hierarchy.

Figure 2.1: Maslow's needs hierarchy (Arends, 2009:142)



2.5.1 Physiological needs

Maslow states that nutrition plays an important role in one's development as it is a basic physiological need. In his theory, one understands that physiological needs are the most important needs that play a role towards the development of an independent and mature person with full potential (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010: 291; Mwamwenda, 2004: 239,241). The very powerful driving factor for prime satisfaction is the bodily needs. Hunger and thirst

have to be fulfilled for one to function normally. Hunger and thirst as the basic needs, distract learners' attention in the classroom too if they are not fulfilled, meaning that learning is impossible in these conditions (Arends, 2009:142; Cotton, 1995:59).

I argue that it is impossible for the learners from child-headed households to concentrate on their learning, when they are living in poverty. The great disadvantage of physiological needs that are not met can be vulnerability to child labour, abuse and exploitation, just for one reason: food (Richter & Desmond, 2008:1023-1024). For individuals to develop their full potential, it is important that their nutrition and health are well cared for (Mwamwenda, 2004:239). Should it happen at a stage that one suffers in these two aspects, the usual outcome is impaired functioning which results in declining scholastic performance (Calitz, 2001:30). As Leatham (2005:63) puts it, poverty itself contributes largely towards learning challenges because it first aggravates stress, then stress affects the daily normal functioning of the person.

2.5.2 Love and belonging

It is important to be loved in order to give love. This plays an important role in the child's development, as indicated by Maslow (Cotton, 1995:60). In the child-headed household, love and belonging are absent. The heads of households find themselves compelled to be in households that are not complete, as there are no parents. At times they are separated from their siblings when they are divided among the relatives. Love helps learners to learn successfully (Cotton, 1995:60) and it is possible that these learners could drop out of school when they do not feel a strong sense of belonging to their school. Children seek acceptance by peers, neighbours and the community at large (Magdol *et al.*, 1992:4), but it is often difficult for them, due to discrimination and stigmatization that they experience due to the fact of becoming heads of households due to HIV and Aids stigmatization (*cf.* 2.4.1; 2.4.2).

It is very important to involve parents in their children's academic learning as they are there to build confidence, interest in the school and willingness to be with other people. It is parents' attitude, honesty, cooperation and discipline that influence the family in general to

be positive (Bernard, 1972:54). Eggen and Kauchak (2010:367) further indicate that several benefits flow from involving parents in their children's learning, such as better achievement, greater willingness to do homework, more positive attitudes and higher levels of self-regulation. The child brings the family to school: one can recognize from the child the kind of family the child comes from (Bernard, 1972:54). The learner who heads a household is faced with illness at home, financial problems, emotions and quarrels that occur at times which might affect their concentration on school work (Donald *et al.*, 2004: 244, 266). Children who head households often lack a sense of belonging due to the absence of parents, and are less likely to seek knowledge of subjects than they are to search for friends (Arends, 2009:142).

Family composition, which is the presence of parents to give assistance and support every time a need arises, plays a major role in creating learning challenges for learners. In child-headed families, where parents are absent, the story is altogether different. A human being can only lead a good, productive and satisfying life if all their basic needs are fully met (Davis, 1989:246) and it is only after the deficiency needs are met, that growth needs (needs in intellectual achievement) can be fulfilled (Mwamwenda, 2004:239; Woolfolk, 2004:353).

Love and security are the second basic needs that have to be fulfilled before one can focus on higher-order needs, as indicated by Maslow (in Mwamwenda, 2004: 241; in Davis, 1989:246).

2.5.3 Safety needs

The second level of needs that have to be met after hunger and thirst have been fulfilled is security. Threat can be physical, when one is looking at a dangerous object, or psychological, when one fears the unknown. The body needs to be protected in a safe home. It must have a safe place to hide during stormy days and when one is clouded with whatever kind of fear (Arends, 2009:142; Cotton, 1995:60). The security of children from child-headed households is not guaranteed. At times they find themselves in the street due to their homes having been claimed by relatives after the death of their parents. They

are affected by the absence of parents who are regarded as figures of hope (Leatham, 2005:71-72; France, 2006). Their health security is also affected because access to health services is impossible for child-headed households; due to lack of finances (Calitz, 2001:19). Their sense of security is also threatened by the lack of financial support for everyday needs and wants. The fact that they do not have parents, threatens them most (Calitz, 2001:19).

For children who head families, life is challenging due to the absence of an adult figure/parent who can guarantee safety. Due to a lack of safety, a learner who heads a household may feel insecure, anxious, mistrustful (Larry, 1996:370) and get demotivated along the path of personal growth, as safety is a primary source of motivation (Leatham, 2005:105).

2.5.4 Esteem

Every individual has a need for a feeling of adequacy, achievement and self-esteem. Receiving attention and respect from others strengthens self-confidence (Clarkson, 2006). This is the level that has to be gratified after love and belonging, which is not the case with the children from child-headed households. It is necessary for learners as young children to be assisted to fulfil the need for approval because if it is not met, they easily submit to peer pressure and become engaged in unwanted or disapproved peer activities (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010:293). They do not feel respected because they are often stigmatized, discriminated against and abused (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:409; German, 2006:148-149; Goffman, 2003), which affect their self-confidence. It becomes difficult for these children to be accepted by the community and even by the relatives, due to poverty and the status of the family after the parental loss, especially through HIV and Aids. Acceptance is difficult and does not often occur, because of the stigma attached to them (German, 2006:148-149). It is even difficult to build friendships, and sadly it is indicated that children who do not have friends are at risk of developing interpersonal problems and emotional disturbances because they feel lonelier in society (Hamachek, 1995:83). In addition to this, Bernard (1972:49) indicates that one's experiences and self-concept determine one's goal

orientation, which implies that learners from child-headed households may experience difficulty in formulating and achieving goals. Their self-esteem might be affected by the conditions in which they live and for not having parents who can approve their activities and motivate them or because they feel isolated due to their circumstances. Feelings of esteem are strongly related to competence, affiliation and influence which leads to greater motivation and involvement in school (Arends, 2009:143).

When the first four levels (basic needs) are not satisfied, as indicated by Woolfolk (2004:353), the motivation or need to fulfil them will not decrease and will affect the normal functioning of the child at a later stage. Children whose feelings of safety and sense of belonging are threatened by the death of parents, and who have no shelter (like those in child-headed household) are bound to vacate their homes for relatives, have little or no interest in learning because they are more concerned with security than with learning (Woolfolk, 2004:353). Basic needs are dependent on other people such as parents for their fulfilment, but if the parent is not there anymore, who is supposed to close the gaps? It is important for teachers to establish good relationships with learners so that those who experience feelings of insecurity can experience safety during teaching and learning (Mwamwenda, 2004: 24).

2.5.5 Knowledge

According to Eloff and Ebersohn (2004:401), human beings experience satisfaction by exploring, solving problems and finding meaning together. Through the social interaction process, they are able to understand and know the world around them together with its challenges. Cognitive development is enhanced by interacting with individuals and the environment (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:401). I argue that due to the fact that children who head households do not often get involved in social relationships, due to fear of stigmatization and discrimination (*cf.* 2.4.1, 2.4.2) and being overburdened by responsibilities at home (*cf.* 2.4.8), they could have limited opportunities for stimulating their cognitive development.

2.5.6 Aesthetic needs

Aesthetic needs imply an appreciation and search for beauty and balance (Maslow, 1970:25-26). The question arises as to whether learners who head households and are overburdened by numerous responsibilities would feel the need to search for beauty and balance in life?

2.5.7 Self-actualization

Finally, after all other levels have been satisfied, individual human beings will attain self-actualization, implying that one's talents and potentials are fulfilled (Clarkson, 2006). Children from child-headed households might not be able to realize their potential and talents because of not having quality of life due to many unfulfilled basic needs. It is said that one's experiences and self-concept determine one's goals (Bernard, 1972:49). However, everybody is in need of success despite the worries that affect concentration.

Learners who head households might never reach the stage or level of self-actualization as they might never reach out to fulfil the growth needs that are extinguished by the basic deficiency needs which they struggle to gratify during their entire childhood (Woolfolk, 2004:353).

2.5.8 Transcendence

Transcendence refers to the supreme otherness of God and His presence in all reality (Knox, 1976:22). According to Knox (1976:22) human beings have the need to be associated with God, the transcendent other. This is a spiritual need that has to be satisfied once the highest self-actualization need has been gratified. Furthermore, Clarkson (2006) also links transcendence to the helping of others to achieve self-actualization. The question arises as to whether learners who struggle with their own self-actualization will be able to help others achieve theirs. Learners who head households experience numerous unmet lower, basic needs which could have an influence on the transcendence need not being met.

Based on the aforementioned, I am of the opinion that unfulfilled needs, as indicated by Maslow, could lead to a number of learning challenges that learners who head households might experience. In the next section I explore a number of these learning challenges.

2.6 LEARNING CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS WHO HEAD HOUSEHOLDS

Learning is a relatively permanent unintentional or deliberate change in an individual's knowledge caused by experience (Woolfolk, 2004:198). Learning can be the acquisition of subject matter, habits, attitude, perception, interest, social adjustment, ideas and skills of many types. In short, Cotton (1995:45) defines learning as acquisition of knowledge and processing that information within the cognition of oneself. Learning can be accidental and informal and intentional and formal at the same time (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:146).

Life without education is devastating, and children who head households are faced with a tragically overwhelming situation of pervasive poverty that leads to their losing out on education for the sake of financial income (Masondo, 2006:4). The worst condition is the route that they normally follow to escape, such as unregulated labour practice and sex trade (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:407). In the case of HIV and Aids, children begin to take great responsibility immediately when parents fall ill. Children who are heads of families have to provide for food, take care of nursing the sick and generate income. This is the time when it begins to be difficult for girls in particular to attend or continue with schooling (Arnab & Serumaga-Zake, 2006:222). Floyd, Crampin, Glynn, Madise, Mwenebabu, Mkhondia, Ngwira and Zaba (2007:788) support this by reporting that children will not attend school regularly when parents are ill due to HIV and Aids up to their death, meaning orphanhood status due to HIV and Aids have more negative effects on child-headed households than orphanhood from death-related to any other illness. It is obvious that in families led by adults there is a great chance to have adequate resources to attend school. Nutrition and health needs will be met, as opposed to the situation in child-headed households (Dannerbeck & Muriukin, 2007:180). Gray *et al.* (2006:16) also report that children who have to take care of siblings and parents who are ill due to HIV and Aids, withdraw from school and often drop out of school for survival (Maclellan in Martinus,

2009:302). In addition to this, children from child-headed households have to go to school hungry due to absence of food and lack of financial resources, and the few that continue schooling are assisted by older siblings with school work (Gray *et al.*, 2006:24, 25). Bearing the above in mind, it is evident that academic performance will be problematic.

When Maslow describes the theory of self-actualization, he identifies stages in a needs hierarchy which comprise, physiological needs, belongingness and love, safety needs, esteem needs, knowledge needs, aesthetic needs, self-actualization and transcendence (Clarkson, 2006; Woolfolk, 2004:353). The female heads of households will face numerous learning challenges due to the fact that their lower, basic needs are not satisfied. In addition to this, resource availability at school and at home, one's interest and self-efficacy, gender, health and nutrition also contribute positively to successful learning (Calitz, 2001:11-23).

Linked to the previous discussion, there are a number of learning challenges that could arise due to the unfulfilled needs among learners who head households.

2.6.1 Expectations

Parental expectations, peer group expectations and self expectations, all have a determining factor towards academic achievement, whether positive or negative (Calitz, 2001:57). Calitz (2001:57) argues that when **parental expectations** are too high, it can lead to feelings of despair and decline in scholastic performance if the learner cannot fulfil the expectations. For the learner from a child-headed family where the parent is not available, there's no one to set expectations and to motivate the learner towards realizing the expectations.

2.6.2 Self-esteem

Every human being has a need for self-respect and esteem of others. Maslow sees it as a desire for reputation or prestige. If self-esteem is satisfied, feelings of self-confidence, self-worth and strength develop (Maslow, 1954). In contrast to self-respect and self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness develop when the need for self-esteem

is not fulfilled. This can be relevant to the learner who heads a household and does not have much hope in life (Maslow, 1954).

People usually acquire conditions of worth when significant others such as parents provide positive unconditional regard, as indicated by Carl Rogers' theory of personality (in Dagmar, 1996:1-2). The learner from a child-headed household who does not have parents experience problems regarding him/herself as worthwhile because there is nobody who provides praise or appreciation (Maslow, 1954; Dagmar, 1996:1-2).

2.6.3 Goal orientation

According to Al-Emadi (2007) and Pintrich and Schunk (2002:213) goal orientation is related to academic achievement, which is positively related to mastery and performance goals. Most of the time, goal orientation and achievement consist of the desire to excel and avoid failure. Individuals may think of outperforming others or mastering a task as a desire to excel. This, then, depends on how one is motivated, which also depends on variables like parenting styles, learning strategies and self-concept (Al-Emadi, 2007). All the challenges that learners from child-headed households can experience (*cf.* 2.6.2-2.6.11) affect them as they struggle to make ends meet for their progress and have very little opportunity to set goals for achievement and success (Al-Emadi, 2007).

2.6.4 Regular school attendance

Learners from child-headed households are often absent from school due to hunger, dirty clothes, lack of proper clothing, no money for school fees or any event to be held at school, and some might not go to school because they do not have somebody to assist them with homework (Nicholson & Jefferson, 2008:411; Mokoena, 2007:2; Goffman, 2003). It is important for learners to attend school regularly and pay attention to classroom activities, but it is difficult for learners from child-headed households, as they struggle to fulfil their physiological needs. Even if they attend, their attention is not always directed to what is done, their minds are preoccupied by things like what they will eat after school,

how they will attend an educational tour and where they will get money to pay for the doctor for the sick sibling at home (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010:291).

2.6.5 Self-regulation

Self-regulation implies that learners become motivationally active participants in their own learning processes and set goals which assist in providing standards against which performance can be compared (Bembenuity, 2006:5, 346, 823; McMillan & Wergin, 2006:75). Learners have to focus their **attention** on setting specific manageable goals, maintaining an appropriate level of motivation and identifying appropriate learning strategies. The most important aspects that play a role in self-regulation are, setting personal goals, vicarious learning experiences, social modelling, social conditions and history of reinforcement (Bembenuity, 2006: 5,346,823). Bembenuity (2006:5,346,823) explains that self-regulated learners can monitor their goals and beliefs, compare their performance with appropriate standards and engage in social and environmental control, which is a different case for learners from child-headed families who are less skilled.

Bandura (in Bembenuity, 2006:5, 346, 823) mentions that self-regulation is effective in most key areas of human development and learning at school. Self-regulation entails learners' self-initiation actions to attain academic goals such as focusing or paying attention in class, engaging in extra classes, studying and doing homework (Bembenuity, 2006:5, 345, 823). It also entails processes such as self-efficacy, strategic learning and self-management. Self-regulated learners need additional time for planning and need more efforts because setting general goals, absolute and non-hierarchical distal goals lead to less motivation and less success (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001:290, 295). Self-regulated learners are capable of delaying gratification which is related to higher motivation and achievement (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001:290, 295). However, efforts for self-regulation depend on learners' situational context (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001:290) which might be a big challenge for the learners who head households because their time is limited and they have household chores waiting for them. It might also be difficult or unimportant for them to set goals and delay gratification for later academic rewards, due to

the hardships and depressing life conditions that they experience (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001:303). Their main and immediate goal might be to provide in the needs of their siblings (*cf.* Newell, 2008:7, 2.2.4.8) and they will therefore be unable to generate appropriate **self-efficacy** beliefs, and **interest** and outcome expectations that could help them attain their predetermined academic goals successfully (Bembenuity, 2006:5,346,823).

2.6.6 Self-efficacy

Bandura (in McMillan & Wergin, 2006:76) defines self-efficacy as personal beliefs concerning one's capability to learn or perform skills at a designated level. It could therefore be possible that, if the negative feelings that learners who head households might experience (*cf.* 2.4.2) are added to their low self-esteem (*cf.* 2.6.2), their academic learning and achievement might be negatively affected. McMillan and Wergin (2006:76) argue that high or positive self-efficacy leads to higher achievement, which relates directly to goal-setting and self-regulation.

2.6.7 Attributions

Attributions are defined as the process through which people seek to identify the causes of behaviour (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:71; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002:93). Children from child-headed households might have learned feelings of helplessness as an attribution due to the negative events they are always exposed to. They tend to be depressed and lose hope, which ultimately affects their academic performance (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:71). This implies that they contribute their success or failure to external factors rather than to their own efforts (Arends, 2009:144).

2.6.8 Cognitive development

Cognition implies thinking about the ways people process information, solve problems, make decisions and expand their knowledge, which are important prerequisites for effective learning (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:14). Eloff and Ebersohn (2004:401) indicate that cognitive and social development contributes to learning, and that cognitive development is

brought about by social interaction. Bearing this argument in mind, it could be that learners who head households might be experiencing difficulties with their cognitive development due to being lonely and withdrawn because of non-involvement in social interaction.

In addition to a lack of social interaction, learners from child-headed households are clouded with emotions related to different aspects such as anger because of losing parents, not having enough food and frustrations for having to do everything by themselves (Martinus, 2009:302, Newell, 2008:6-7) (*cf.* 2.4.7, 2.4.8). When one is emotionally affected, one's cognitive system is also affected and one's ability of problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making and creative endeavour is negatively hampered (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:34).

2.6.9 Motivation

Motivation is the commitment or self-control that affords cognition, and is a process of an instigated and sustained activity which is goal-directed (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010: 284). Schunk and Zimmerman (2001:246, 247) indicates that motivation is about one's identity which refers to personal activities that emerge from cultural context. Motivation informs one's beliefs and the goals that one sets, and how to prioritize and coordinate among experiences. Learners, who are motivated to learn, normally find academic activities meaningful and worthwhile (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001:246). The girl-learner who heads a household may not be motivated to learn as certain basic needs are unfulfilled. Needs for food, security, love and self-esteem could become barriers to be motivated to study further and to achieve academic goals (Mwamwenda, 2004:237).

2.6.10 Parental involvement

Parental involvement is one of the important aspects that play a role in a learner's academic performance (Calitz, 2001:17). It has been indicated in the introduction of the section (*cf.* 2.6) that learning can take place informally (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:146), and this is where the parents take the lead. Parents can assist and teach their children proper

ways of talking, correct ways of doing things and also assist with homework, give advice and offer moral support (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004:146). In child-headed households, the need to belong might not be met (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010:367), and there is no parent attending to activities such as assisting with homework, giving advice and offering support. Due to a lack of parental involvement, learners who head households are less motivated, as parental discipline, control, monitoring, concern and encouragement as aspects of a parent-child-relationship are missing (Magdol *et al.*, 1992:7). Academic performance cannot be positive in such conditions and therefore the chances for learners who head households to learn successfully are very slim (Magdol *et al.*, 1992:7).

Bennaars (in Calitz, 2001:43) supports this argument by mentioning that parents assist with physical, emotional and social development which is needed for the children's effective adaptation to the school environment. It is difficult for the learner from a child-headed household to adapt to the school environment as her emotional and social development might be limited. Some learners who head households might be very young and without adequately developed skills to deal with emotions. Coetzee (in Coetzee, 2005:20) highlights that the "*basis of education is laid in the family*", while Engelbrecht (in Coetzee, 2005:20) highlights the fact that together with the parent, education is a changing agent in the society. I argue that parents play an important role and powerful role at home regarding children's development for the purpose of letting them become successful human beings in life and academically. Therefore children who head households are faced with a great challenge now that they do not have parents to accompany them through their development.

According to Leatham (2005:68), the family satisfies children's psychological needs (such as security), emotional needs (like being there to carry whatever is bothering them), cognitive needs (like offering guidance towards decision-making and problem-solving) and academic needs (attending parents meetings and assisting when faced with difficult work from studies).

Child-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. The learners from child-headed households are disadvantaged by the death of their parents and against such conditions, I believe, it is unlikely for academic performance to be favourable. This links to the threatened safety needs: when parents are not alive, learners are always scared by little things because there is nobody to lean on and to protect them even against discrimination (Calitz, 2001:19) (*cf.* 2.5.2).

2.6.11 Socio-economic factors

Living in poverty leads to difficulties in learning, and learning difficulties cause more poverty because one might drop out from school without having a career, which leads to financial difficulties (Woolfolk, 2004:158). Child-headed households are exposed to health and safety risks such as malnutrition and infections due to poverty (Donald *et al.*, 2004: 205). It is further indicated that these health risks result in physical, intellectual, sensory and neurological problems leading to learning barriers (Donald *et al.*, 2004:205).

Poor nutrition can result in poor or bad health conditions, mental retardation and other illnesses due to malnutrition (Calitz, 2001:20). Calitz (2001:20) points out that poor nutrition contributes to lack of concentration and lack of recalling information, which means learners can experience problems with their academic tasks. Magdol *et al.* (1992:4) also indicates that being at risk of poor health and nutrition affects the ability to concentrate in the classroom, which affects academic performance.

Learners who head households are more likely to lack basic academic skills due to the way they are brought up. The stress and lack of social support as a result of unavailability of parents adversely affect their intellectual development which then affects academic performance (Magdol *et al.*, 1992:5). Mokoena (2007:51) highlights the fact that in most areas where children are affected by HIV and Aids, access to health services is limited. In the case of child-headed households, both poor nutrition and unfavourable health conditions could have a negative impact on the academic performance of learners as they

might be consistently absent from school for a long period due to ill-health since they struggle to access health services (Mokoena, 2007:51). It is possible that these learners might be retained in grades and end up dropping out of school due to poverty (Woolfolk, 2004: 158).

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I looked at child-headed households and learning challenges that may be experienced by learners who head households. The concept child-headed household was defined as a household which is lead by children who are below the age of 18, because of the permanent absence of the parents or any adult guardian (*cf.* 2.2.2), caused by HIV and Aids, chronically sick parents, low marriage rates and migration due to job seeking (*cf.* 2.3).

The Constitution of South Africa (SA, 1996:13) specifies that basic needs have to be met in a child's life for proper development towards adulthood. The constitution mentions health, food, safety and education as children's rights that have to be taken into consideration by every citizen. This is, however, not the case with the learner who heads a household (*cf.* 2.5).

HIV and Aids was identified as the major cause of child-headed households as it took lives of many people leaving children alone as orphans. It was further indicated that there are still millions of people who can still die from HIV and Aids. This implies an increase in the number of orphans that can still be expected, as well as an increased number of child-headed households (*cf.* 2.2.1)

The impact of child-headed households is negative in nature. These refer *inter alia* to discrimination, stigmatization, crime, abuse, household responsibilities, limited education, psycho-social problems, crime, poverty and child labour (*cf.* 2.4).

Due to the negative effects mentioned in the previous paragraph, learners who head households experience a number of unfulfilled needs (*cf.* 2.5). These needs refer to physical needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, knowledge needs,

aesthetic needs, self-actualization needs and transcendence needs. Bearing the number of needs in mind, I argue that a number of learning challenges could arise due to the lack of need fulfilment, namely an absence of expectations, lack of self-esteem, poor goal-orientation, irregular school attendance, lack of self-regulation, low self-efficacy, negative attributions, deficient cognitive and social development, poor motivation, lack of parental involvement and poor socio-economic conditions (*cf.* 2.6.1-2.6.8). These challenges contribute *inter alia* to poor concentration, poor attention span, low levels of motivation, lack of interest to set and attain goals, lack of skills for solving problems and collecting information, and dropping out of school (*cf.* 2.6).

In the next chapter a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology used in the study follows.