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#### **5.10.5 Coping Strategies**

Prayer and communication were regarded as the main coping strategies for the single parents. Two participants reported that scheduling family meetings allowed parents and children the opportunity to openly discuss and voice their concerns. One participant in the study found that venting with people in a similar position helped because it was easier to confide in people who have the same challenges. Participants found peace of mind in frequently attending church and reading the bible. One relied on sleeping, emphasising the importance of maintaining physical and mental wellbeing as a single parent, while another found gospel music to be therapeutic in coping with stresses and challenges.

#### **5.10.6 Support Structures**

Williams (2012) maintained that single parents who lack financial resources are more inclined to live with their parents, and while most of the study participants resided by themselves they indicated that their parents played a huge role in assisting financially and raising the children.

Participants were pleased to acknowledge family as their biggest source of support, consistently availing themselves to help out and with a few single parents reporting that they would frequently leave their children with their grandparents if they required babysitting. Two participants in the study acknowledged their neighbours for giving invaluable support,

with one of them reporting that her neighbours were always willing to stand in as father figures at events or school meetings that her daughter needed to attend. Participants who had family living outside of the city also considered the church and their faith community as family. The single parents relied on friends for moral support and regularly met up with friends, who provided a good distraction. Two of the participants were consulting with mental health professionals to work through their issues.

#### **5.10.7 The emergence of single parents within the church and its implications**

It has been reported that single-parent families have always existed and that they are becoming a lot more obvious within the church. It was advocated that single parents should be at liberty to scrutinise how these normative values and beliefs have negatively impacted them. One participant in the study encouraged the challenging of perceived truths concerning single parents. Moreover, church leaders emphasised that congregants should show that the church is serious about embracing change. They felt that the church should become more pragmatic in creating a space for single parents to be included in leadership structures across the different ministries, making the point that single parents would provide a different set of skills, knowledge and experience.

Study participants were happy to acknowledge that the church loves to embrace, support and be of assistance to congregants in the different phases of their lives. The church advocated the value of men in the congregation as mentors in the lives of children, and study participants revealed that while male single parents are often disregarded, it is the church's obligation to embrace change and bring about a well-balanced perception of parenting. Overall, the church leaders didn't perceive single parenting or the status of being 'single' as a problem, but acknowledged single parenting as an opportunity for ministry and highlighted the role of the church in providing assistance.

The different ways that church leaders assisted the single parents in the congregation include hosting workshops where topics concerning single parenting, motherhood and fatherhood are addressed through both the women and men's ministry in which the children of single-parent families are included. Belonging to a prayer group in the church was considered critical, because the congregation is big and it is within smaller groups that the needs of single-parent families can be personally addressed. The church leaders also stressed that if single parents weren't part of the network, they would begin to feel alienated in seeking assistance from the church. Participants felt strongly that the church should be doing a lot more to accommodate single parents, and while the frequent ministries usually took preference, participants suggested that organising a "*single parent day*", where single parents can discuss their challenges, was a high priority moving forward.

It was emphasised that the church should feel confident about educating those within the congregation who have contributed to single parents feeling excluded and that implementing a single-parent ministry would provide the platform to address these concerns. The church leaders realised that implementing a single-parent ministry would be a learning experience for both single parents and other congregants. Study participants were happy to acknowledge that investing in a single-parent ministry would be a wise decision on the part of the church, which had come to realise the need for it. Participants also felt that while the sentiments regarding a single-parent ministry were fairly optimistic, it remained unfamiliar territory for the church. Furthermore, finances and proper resources were considered obstacles in developing and leading a single parent ministry.

## 5.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the information gathered from the participants. The results presented the subjective views towards single parenting, perceptions towards single parents in the church, the challenges experienced by single parents within the church, support structures, coping mechanisms, along with the emergence of single parenting within the church and its implications. The results are summarised in chapter five, followed by the conclusion in chapter six.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The following chapter will conclude this research study and present the limitations and recommendations of the study.

### **6.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

As previously mentioned, due to time constraints and tight schedules, only four church leaders across the three churches availed themselves to be interviewed, individually. Therefore no focus group sessions were conducted as originally stipulated in the proposal. Since the sample of church leaders was too small and as the views regarding single parenting were similar, there wasn't enough information to draw inferences regarding discrepancies in terms of the views about single parenting at the three churches (of different denominations) that were used for this study. Due to circumstances beyond the researcher's control, many single parents either backed out from or didn't pitch for the interviews that had been scheduled, thus it was impossible to interview as many as 30 participants in the study as initially stipulated in the proposal. Furthermore, although it was also stipulated in the proposal that the interviews were to be conducted at the church, unfortunately permission to use the church was withdrawn and the researcher switched to conducting the interviews in public settings and later, when noisy surroundings became an issue, at the homes of the participants.

The study was conducted in English, although Afrikaans was the home language of a few participants. Since most of the interviews were conducted in the evenings after participants returned home from work, some of the participants were hasty to get through the interview, which impacted on the quality of information received from them. The sample size in terms of the number of study participants wasn't large enough to draw inferences in terms of the country's single-parent population. The theoretical framework, which had its own shortcomings, could only be applied to certain themes, and in other cases there was no relation between the concepts of the theory and the results/themes of the study. Unfortunately, the number of single fathers who partook in this study was also very small.

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The researcher has every intention of taking the results to the church leaders and calling a meeting with all single parents where the findings can be discussed collectively. Based on the findings, the researcher hopes that the respective church leaders and single parents are able to engage and work around the different needs and challenges of the single parents in developing support structures, but also that the church will entertain the various suggestions made by single parents about being accommodating towards them.

Future studies could explore how children perceive the concept of family and how/to what extent the classification of diverse family forms impacts on children. While the number of female single parents outweighed the number of male single parents in this study, it would be beneficial for future studies to be conducted with more single fathers to explore the concept of single fatherhood within the South African context.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that most of the single parents' access to social support is derived from their informal social networks, through their relations with family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. Having this support network made it possible to for single parents to obtain financial assistance, moral support, childcare and accommodation. The findings also indicated that those single parents without immediate family relied on church membership and their faith community in seeking emotional and material support. In other cases, having no support pushed some single parents to develop their own method of coping with their challenges and which they've identified as a 'support system'. Other participants made use of formal support networks in obtaining psychological and counselling services.

Finances, budgeting, time, excessive travelling, poor sleeping habits, discipline and unbearable family members are amongst some of the challenges that single parents are experienced. In coping with these challenges, most single parents emphasised that they found comfort in prayer, attending church and reading the bible, relying on friends, family and their faith community in navigating through these challenges. Participants had mixed reviews towards the type of support offered by the church for single parents. The support structures available at two of the three churches in the Kuils River community were rather disappointing to some single parents, on the grounds that those sources of support didn't do much to remedy the circumstances/challenges that single parents found themselves in. Other single parents found comfort in the prayers, advice and emotional support received from their church friends and church leaders. The findings also indicated that most of the church leaders weren't informed about how to adequately support and accommodate single parents in the church, while other church leaders weren't always aware of the challenges experienced by single parents. Nonetheless, the participants provided a number of ways that the church could

better support the single parents, which consisted of: providing mentorship to the children of single-parent families, providing shuttle services, donating food hampers, providing child supervision during church services and being sensitive towards single parents when delivering church sermons.

While the church and the church leaders prided themselves on embracing and displaying non-discriminatory attitudes towards single parents, some of the single parents didn't agree with these sentiments. Participants highlighted several factors that negatively impacted single parents within the church. Discrimination, a sense of division within the church, feelings of shame, inadequacy and a lack of support had caused some single parents to feel alienated and morally inferior to married people in the congregation. The church leaders acknowledged the way that conservative religious beliefs had contributed to single parents feeling victimised and excluded, advocating that the church should start challenging those normative patterns of thought by creating contexts and platforms where single parents are encouraged to voice their struggles.

The church leaders have also prioritised and highlighted the importance of consistently engaging the single parents in determining how the church could be of assistance to them. Church leaders have also entertained the possibility of implementing a single-parent ministry, having realised the value it will add in addressing the single parents as well as navigating the obstacles that come with single parenting.



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