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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to investigate how single parenting is perceived within the context of the churches in Kuils River and to establish if any support structures are in place to assist single parents. This research was confined to the Kuils River community and was conducted in three churches of different denominations. A qualitative approach in the form of an exploratory study was used to conduct this research. Participants were recruited from the three churches in Kuils River. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to recruit suitable participants, comprising single mothers and fathers (20 years old and above) who attended church as well as the respective church leaders. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with these single parents and church leaders. Data was manually transcribed and analysed by means of thematic analysis. Ethical approval was sought from the University's Ethics Committee and permission was granted by the respective church leaders. Participants were informed and assured of confidentiality, anonymity and that their participation in the study was completely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained and participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study. The findings indicated that single parents with immediate family obtained support through their informal support networks, while those without immediate family relied on the church for support. The findings also indicated that while the church provided support to a certain extent, the type of support offered did not fulfil the needs of single-parent families, and that the church should be doing more to support and accommodate single parents. While the church and the church leaders prided themselves on embracing and displaying non-discriminatory attitudes towards single parents, stigma, shame, feelings of inadequacy and failure to acknowledge single parents in the congregation has caused single parents to feel excluded, morally inferior and alienated within the church.

DECLARATION

I declare that *The Church and Single Parenting: Perceptions and Social Support* is my own work, that the dissertation or information therein has not been submitted before for any other course or degree and that all the sources I have used have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Lucrechia van Staden

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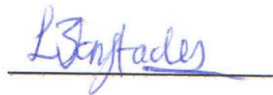
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CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The family has long been considered a paramount characteristic of every society and as a social institution; there are specific roles the family renders in shaping and sustaining everyday life (Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003). The family remains the primary socialising agent and is considered to be the moral fabric of society (Ogormegbunem 2014).

Central to the concept of the family is acknowledging the diversity in the roles, responsibilities and structure within the family unit across different cultures. Typical functions of the family include: procreation, providing a safe and stable living environment, providing physical, emotional and financial security, socialising and instilling moral values in children and ascribing identity to its members (Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003).

Conceptualising the family has proven to be challenging for social scientists; apart from the various distinct family forms that exist today with their own set of customs and traditions, there remains multiple perspectives in attempts to define the concept of family. While Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott (2003) proclaim that the concept of the family is subjective, Ogormegbunem (2014) maintains that the concept of the family is socially constructed through relationships. Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott (2003) also assert that the concept of family is innate, because humans are born with a natural inclination to want to belong to a particular group (Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003).

In trying to define the concept of family within the African context, Okon (2013) emphasises that a rise in unmarried couples with children, the rise in divorce and re-marriage rates, a

decline in civil marriage and the emergence of child-headed households renders it difficult to achieve a global, “all-encompassing” definition of family.

However, for the purpose of the study, The Population Reference Bureau (1990, cited in Enrique, Howk and Huitt, 2007:1) defines family as: “A group of people held together by birth, marriage, adoption, common residence or close emotional attachment.” Moore (2007) reveals that the legal definition of family is more fluid and is not limited to individuals who are related via marriage/blood or adoption.

1.2 FAMILY FORMS

Broadly speaking, there are four distinct categories of family, namely: the nuclear family, the extended family, the single-parent family and the reconstituted family (Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003). Changes and developments in society were accompanied by changes in the structure of the family that resulted in the emergence of new family forms, deviating from the nuclear family that was traditionally acknowledged, idealised and advocated as the norm, the primary family form (Okon, 2013; Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003). While the ideology surrounding the nuclear family emphasises that this family form is “natural” and the “best”, feminists argue that patriarchy within the family oppresses and marginalises women along with the unequal division of domestic labour, while it is within the family that patterns of domestic violence emerge. (Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003; Ho, 2015).

The extended-family structure – also characterised as intergenerational – consists of three or more generations living in the same house. According to Chatters, Celious and Taylor (n.d.), in the United States the extended-family household is more widespread among black people than white people. Besides the household-head and the children, the extended-family

household includes members who are either related through marriage/blood networks or who are unrelated (Chatters, Celious and Taylor, n.d.). Armstrong (2012) emphasises the importance of extended families in becoming a source of financial, emotional and social support, while assisting with parenting and domestic responsibilities. The authors also reported that during economic recession, it became increasingly difficult for nuclear families to maintain their social status due to factors including low-income, high living expenses and costly tuition fees, whereas extended families were better able to deal with household expenses, thereby alleviating financial difficulties (Armstrong, 2012).

Okon (2013) highlights that in rural communities, the extended-family members would share the same residence, while in urbanised societies, the extended-family members live in close proximity to each other rather than with each other. Armstrong (2012) also revealed that urbanisation and industrialisation was responsible for the gradual decline of extended-family households.

The single-parent family consists of a single parent and her/his dependent children.

According to Thompson (2008), sociologists noted that divorce, death and separation of spouses constituted the main causes of single-parenting for married couples. In addition, the termination of a couple's relationship after the birth of a child is the root cause of single-parenting among unmarried couples (Thompson, 2008). Increased employment opportunities for women along with welfare grants were identified as factors that gave rise to single-parenting within contemporary society. This family form is typically perceived as deviant from the norm and posing challenges to social order. Simultaneously, it is becoming more commonplace in South Africa, with Anyebe, Lawal, DoDo and Adeniyi (2017) reporting that 28% of the country's women are single parents. Undoubtedly, there are positive aspects to

single-parenting that can be overlooked and, since the focus of this study is on the single-parent family, they will be further explored in due course.

The reconstituted-family, otherwise known as a 'blended-family', is formed through re-marriage or cohabitation in which two single parents and their children from prior relationships/marriages all reside in the same house (Lietz, 2010). And as Juby, Le Bourdais and Gratton (2001) outlined, for some individuals entering this family form it will be the first time that they are exposed to or obliged to adopt a parent's roles. As with every family, the blended-family is certainly not devoid of challenges, the most pressing of which in this family structure is finding a compromise between the roles and needs of the spouse and the children.

This begs the question, within the context of the diverse family structures of today, of whether it is possible to belong to more than one category of family. For example: if a 'previously-married-but-now-divorced' couple still live together, is the mother and father each recognised as a single parent despite their living arrangement, or does the arrangement classify them as a 'cohabiting family'? Also, what implications does the classification of 'families' have on children? And how do children perceive the concept of 'family' when their family structure is different to that of the nuclear family? How much accuracy can one attribute to these 'labels/categories' if part of identifying/conceptualising the 'family' depends on an individual's subjective opinion? This is just one of many examples highlighting that the term 'family' can well be far too complex to be boxed/moulded by way of labels/categories.

1.3 HOUSEHOLDS

Closely linked to the concept of family is the concept of household, and while they are used interchangeably, each conveys different meanings. Scott (1997:539, cited in Mcgrath, 2012) defines household as: “*A group of people living together under the same roof and sharing basic accommodation facilities.*” While (Murphy, Harvey and Silvestre, 2005:269, cited in Van Breda, n.d.) define “*household*” as “*people eating from the same pot*”. The concept of household is not confined to the nuclear family but makes provision for individuals who share a residence with people they bear no relation to (Mcgrath, 2012; Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003).

Van Breda (n.d.) emphasises that the concept of household is too flexible, because household membership is continuously under a process of change. Equally important is defining the head of the household, and while there is no fixed definition of ‘household head’, traditionally this role has been fulfilled by men because of culturally-assigned gender roles and expectations (Bammeke, 2010). Drawing on the study conducted in Nigeria, Bammeke (2010) also makes the distinction that, because households operated by men are in line with cultural expectations, men receive more support and are applauded for fulfilling this role. Whereas households operated by women are not met with the same admiration and are considered unusual – stereotypes associated with female-headed households fuelling the misconception that the single-parent family is defective.

Interestingly, Kishor and Neitzel (1996) view female-headed households in a positive light. Among the advantages associated with women being household heads is that they are at liberty to control their resources, enjoying a greater degree of independence than women who are not household heads. Furthermore, the authors highlight that there is no wide discrepancy between the number of female-headed households in rural areas versus that in urban areas.

More importantly, the authors emphasised that the incidence of female-headed households is higher among women who are over 50 years old, with widowhood, divorce and separation typically giving rise to female-headed households. The authors also observed that household heads are more likely to be employed, have lower levels of education and inclined to be older and widowed as opposed to non-household heads (Kishor and Neitzel, 1996; Mookodi, 2000).

Posel (2001 cited in Winniefred, 2015) underlined that the household head in South Africa is typically the eldest and highest-income earner. This begs the question of how the concept of household head applies where children are in charge because the parent or authority figure or guardian is physically/mentally unable to cope and even though the children are not breadwinners. Also, while the distinct household structures in South Africa contributed in part to our multi-ethnic society, one cannot dispute the influences that South Africa's political system, urbanisation and industrialisation had on families (Hall, 2017; Amoateng, Heaton and Sabiti, 2007).

Because of the way the apartheid system was 'designed' to create division and ensure the empowerment of white people at the expense of marginalised groups, the socio-economic inequalities that stem from this division manifested in the way family structures and households were formed. Moreover, the migrant labour system associated with apartheid resulted in rural areas experiencing a significant decline in marriages, families growing up without fathers, a widespread emergence of female-headed households and the formation of extended-family households (Richter, Chikovore and Makusha, 2010). According to Amoateng, Heaton and Sabiti (2007), the nuclear family is more widespread amongst white and Asian people, while the extended-family is more widespread amongst black and coloured people. Enjoying a range of benefits and access to resources under apartheid rule allowed

white people the ‘privilege’ of having smaller families and household units, while the extended-family households in rural areas encouraged the sharing of household resources amongst household members, which operated as a ‘protective factor’ in response to the political and economic objectives of the apartheid system (Amoateng, Heaton and Sabiti, 2007).

Amoateng, Heaton and Sabiti (2007) highlight that living arrangements in South Africa are partially influenced by the levels of education and urbanisation. They emphasise that households with no or low levels of education are typically headed by single mothers, while smaller and nuclear-family households are more widespread in urban areas and amongst white people, which stems from lower fertility rates, upholding values of independent living and the practise of monogamy (Amoateng, Heaton and Sabiti, 2007). The authors also highlight that extended-family households amongst the black population stem from poverty, higher fertility rates, the practise of polygamy and the significance they place on a communitarian value system. Evidently, this complex variation in the structure and formation of family units and households within South Africa challenges the prevailing assumption that the nuclear-family structure is the ‘norm’. In addition, Amoateng, Heaton and Sabiti (2007) stress that family structure and household formation across racial and gender lines are significantly influenced by culture, education and income.

1.4 LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Vital to understanding the concept of ‘household’ is exploring the many livelihood strategies that individuals employ to ensure survival. Hossain (2005:2) defines livelihood as *“compromising the abilities, assets, including both social and material resources and activities required for a means of living”*. Simply put, the concept of livelihood strategies

addresses how individuals/families/households are able to sustain themselves and ensure their basic necessities. Perret, Ansewu and Mathebula (2005) highlight that individual/household livelihoods emerge from various sources such as production, trade, handiwork and social grants. Furthermore, the authors emphasised that while rural people are generally more inclined to be employed within the agricultural sector and with 70% of rural households performing farming-related activities, only 2.7% of the rural households in South Africa depend on farming as their primary source of income (Perret *et al*, 2005). A study conducted by Hossain (2005) denotes that the primary survival strategy for individuals from lower-income communities is to have more members of the household join the labour force.

According to Lokshin, Harris and Popkin (2000) there are various ways that single mothers can amplify the social and economic resources available to them after divorce, which usually involves single mothers moving in with either their parents or their in-laws. Also, single mothers either remain with their ex-husbands or share the household with people they are not related to, and Lokshin *et al* (2000) report that this type of living arrangement may give rise to the pooling of household resources while sharing childcare and domestic responsibilities. A study by Lokshin *et al.* (2000) focusing on a Russian mother's household strategies for coping with poverty found that a large fraction of single mothers – especially young mothers – are more inclined to live with their grandparents. The authors reported that this extended living arrangement proves especially beneficial during economic difficulties, and they also highlighted the significant increase of single mothers participating in the workforce, with wages accounting for the biggest percentage of total household income (Lokshin *et al.*, 2000).

Social grants received from the state are significantly greater than wages for single mothers with children who reside with grandparents than they are for single mothers who reside by themselves. On the other hand, transfers between relatives is another source of income for

single mothers, and financial assistance from relatives is much greater for single mothers who reside by themselves than single mothers who live in extended households (Lokshin *et al*, 2000). Interestingly, Lokshin *et al* (2000) also found that single fathers are more inclined to reside in extended households, because they require assistance with childcare. Moreover, the authors suggested that older children in the household could help with childcare and contribute financially.

In the South African context, Sidloyi (2010) makes a distinction between ‘vulnerable female-headed households’ and those female-headed households that are operated by women who are qualified, employed and have access to basic resources. According to the author, the factors that render some female-headed households ‘vulnerable’ include no education or a low level of education, unemployment or low-income positions in the workplace, relying on public assistance as well as mental or physical illnesses. The differences in the characteristics of the household have implications for the ‘diversity’ of livelihood/ survival strategies in ensuring survival. Sidloyi (2010) found that sharing household items, renting out rooms, lending/borrowing money and state pensions were amongst the various other strategies employed to make ends meet in female-headed household in South Africa.

1.5 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

It has been argued that single-parent households have become the norm in South Africa. According to Stats SA (2015), only 33% of children under the age of five live with both biological parents. Only 33% of the country’s black children live with both parents and 33% live with their fathers, whereas 97% of the Indian children and 87% of white children live with both parents. It was also reported that half of South Africa’s mothers are single parents and often experience poverty (Stats SA, 2015).

While there is no literature or data on the prevalence of single parents within the Kuils River community, sociological investigation contends that children of single parents are more likely to be financially unstable, perpetrators of crime and violence, drug users, poor academic scholars and teenage parents (Udansky, 2003). With this being the case, much of the social research focusing on single parenting is motivated by the adverse outcomes it poses for the children. In addition, there is also the tendency of social research to exaggerate and draw false inferences of the effects of single parenting based on social class. Of critical importance is acknowledgement of the extent to which the family structure has changed and broken down as the era of globalisation and industrialisation gradually evolved.

According to Kretzschmar (1998), a consequence of urbanisation in Europe was the separation of families and friends as people migrated in search of employment. In South Africa, men left home to work in the mines, which ultimately resulted in children being reared in the absence of a father figure. Given that the father figure is typically associated with laying down the moral standards and discipline (Meyer, Moore and Viljoen, 2008), it is generally thought that in the absence of a father figure within the household, children are prone to develop deviant and delinquent behavioural patterns (Shwartz, 2003). Although the nuclear family has been conceptualised as the type most suitable for child development (Dykstra, Kalmijn, Knijn, Komter, Liefbroer and Mulder, 2005), and as much as every child is rightfully entitled to a warm, loving and protective family unit, in countries like South Africa it appears that many children are denied this right. Inequality, poverty, unemployment, crime, violence and substance abuse disrupt the stability and security of family life, and many children become victims of marital discord, divorce, family breakdown and single-parent households.

In a more optimistic outlook, Dowd (1997, cited in Russo and Clark, n.d.) demonstrates that independence, self-reliance and gender-respect are amongst some of the positive qualities cultivated by members of single-parent families. The authors also emphasise that poverty can positively influence the overall achievements, standard of living and state of wellbeing of people who grow up under such conditions (Russo and Clark, n.d.), and amongst the other positive influences of single parenting is the establish of a more meaningful relationship between parent and child because many single parents tend to spend the bulk of their time with their children.

Mathews (2011) maintained that single mothers are vulnerable because they fall victim to financial and food insecurity, inadequate housing and healthcare along with residing in high-risk, unsafe and undesirable neighbourhoods. The financial standing of single-parent households, the overload in the accumulation of roles by the single parent as well as the social and emotional repercussions evokes negative psychological outcomes for the children (Stephen and Udisi, 2016). In response to the elevated levels of stress and anxiety associated with the various roles that single parents have to fulfil, many of them adopt religious beliefs and practices as coping mechanisms (Sheets, 2014).

Petts and Knoester (2007) acknowledged that to a certain extent, religion shapes the belief and value systems as well as the behavioural patterns of most people. Sheets (2014) emphasised that religion bestows certain roles within the lives of parents which directly influences the way they socialize their children. Furthermore, Petts and Knoester (2007) found religion quite beneficial when it came to an adult's wellbeing, with many adults reporting a sense of unity and structure in their daily lives, and the positive outcomes of religion extend to the benefits it poses for families by providing a platform for social interaction, nourishing family relationships and establishing social networks.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This research sought to investigate how single parenting is perceived within the context of the church and to establish if any support structures are in place to assist single parents. Since single parenting is rapidly emerging as a dominant new family form, what are the implications of the transition in the family structure within the context of the churches in Kuils River?

The problem is that single parents as a group are often stigmatised, victimised and side-lined in the church (Makbuhele, 2008). Even today, the prevailing discourses regarding single parenting that dominate the church include that of single parenting being the result of a misfortune or a curse (Winniefred, 2015). There is also a perception that the status of being a single mother draws ‘unnecessary attention’ from married men – in other words, that single mothers are basically a ‘distraction’ to married men (Makbuhele, 2008).

The church is generating the negative perception that as believers, single parents are ‘inferior’ because single parenting goes against conservative Christian values. This view could be partially rooted in the assumption within society as a whole that the heteronormative-nuclear family is the ideal. Naturally it is assumed that at the church, there ought to be a moral obligation to accept others unconditionally, but in the case of single parenting, drawing on the literature, it appears that single parenting is still perceived in a negative light.

Single parenting can be very demanding and isolating for those who do not have proper support structures. In the context of the church, the experiences can be further exacerbated by the stigma and societal perceptions associated with the status of being a single parent.

Ultimately the goal of this research will help to create a greater awareness of the situation, with hopes that the church will reach out to single parents with the intention of being more sensitive and accommodating towards them by creating a system of support.

1.6 RATIONALE

While the single-parent family is becoming the norm, rather than the nuclear family, the change appears to be a negative development with undesirable implications in the context of the church. Can it be assumed that the church will address the issue of single parenting head on, as opposed to sweeping it under the rug? Indeed, Sheets (2014) revealed that single mothers turn to religion as a coping mechanism, but this does not necessarily imply that all single parents who attend church are receiving support. It begs the questions: Do single parents feel any less Christian or less of a parent within the context of the church? What kind of impact does access to church support structures have on single parenting?

Since there's been a gradual increase in the number of fathers taking on the roles of single parents, both males and females among the community's single-parents were recruited and interviewed for this study. And since the views towards single parenting are twofold in this case, church leaders were also invited to engage with the subject matter. Indeed, no one is expecting or advocating that the church provide solutions to all the challenges that come with single parenting, but providing a system of support could lighten the burden for single parents.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the implications of the transition in the family structure within the context of the church?
2. What are some of the barriers/challenges experienced by single parents within the church?
3. What structures are currently in place to facilitate single parents in the church?
4. What can the church do differently to be more accommodating and supportive towards single parents?

1.9.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to investigate how single parenting is perceived within the context of the church and to establish if any support structures are in place to assist single parents.

1.9.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the perceptions towards single parenting
2. To investigate the challenges experienced by single parents in the church
3. To establish whether mechanisms are in place to assist single parents

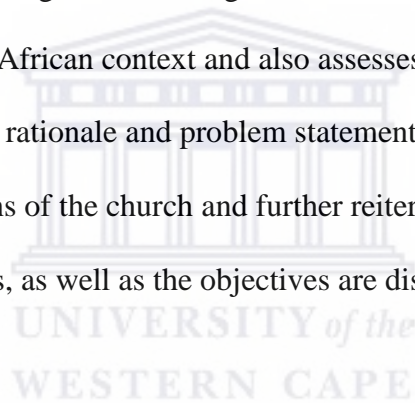
1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This will help to address the lack of literature on ‘single parenting and religion’ within a South African context. The study sought to provide valuable insight to single parents and the church, with the hope that the church will reach out and be more sensitive and

accommodating towards the plight of the single-parent community. Hopefully, once awareness is raised the church will be inclined to take the appropriate steps in trying to include single parents within its ministry while attempting to provide strategies to collectively (as a congregation) create a system of support for single parents.

1.11 CONCLUSION

The introduction deconstructs important concepts in defining the emergence of the single-parent family by paying attention to the different family forms, households, living arrangements and livelihood strategies. The background to the study addresses the single-parent family within the South African context and also assesses the role/benefits that religion poses for families. The rationale and problem statement specifically focuses on single parenting through the lens of the church and further reiterates the importance of conducting this study. The aims, as well as the objectives are discussed.



1.12 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter one includes an introduction to and background of the subject under investigation. In addition, the problem statement and rationale are discussed, the aims and objectives of the study are explained and a description and explanation of the theoretical framework is provided.

Chapter two includes a theoretical discussion.

Chapter three includes literature that focuses on defining single parenting, the different forms of single parenting, the prevalence of single parenting both locally and globally, the social

and economic impacts of single parenting, along with the religious and moral aspects of single parenting.

Chapter four focuses on the methodology employed in conducting this study, which includes the research design, participants and sampling, data collection and analysis as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter five analyses the information and data received from the participants, with the information grouped under various themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data using thematic analyses. A discussion and summary of the themes are also provided in this chapter.

Chapter six concludes the study, along with the recommendations and limitations of the study.



CHAPTER 2

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In its simple form, social capital highlights the ‘advantages’ that are rooted in strong social networks and usually it is within the family that social capital is created. As one of the pioneers of the social capital theory, Bourdieu (1997:47, cited in Edwards, Franklin and Holland, 2003) defines social capital as an “*aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition*”. Lin (2005) emphasises that through social connections/relationships, individuals are presented with an opportunity to gain access to certain resources. Social capital comprises resources that are gradually acquired over time, transferred over generations (Edwards *et al*, 2003). The resources accessible from the social networks include but are not limited to social status, information and material resources (Johnson, 2004).

Hawkin and Mauer (2003) make distinctions between the three types of social capital. Bonding social capital, also characterised as the strongest form of social capital, denotes ties between individuals who are ‘alike’ and share similar socio-economic characteristics. Bonding social capital takes place in homogeneous societies, where people are familiar with each other, and while this type of social connection is capable of providing social and emotional support during unexpected life events, it rarely yields positive outcomes for disadvantaged individuals who want to increase their social mobility (Lin, 2001 cited in Hawkin and Mauer, 2003; Edwards *et al*, 2003; Thieme, 2006).

Bridging social capital refers to connections between individuals who are different with reference to socio-economic characteristics. Bridging social capital stems from weaker social relationships but is accompanied by more effective outcomes, through increasing an influx of and accessibility to different types of social capital (Lin, 2001 cited in Hawkin and Mauer, 2003; Thieme, 2006).

Linking social capital measures the degree to which individuals/groups create social relationships with powerful individuals/groups/institutions in pursuit of personal or collective objectives. Linking social capital stems from the weakest social connection but is accompanied by highly favourable outcomes (Lin, 2001 cited in Hawkin and Mauer, 2003).

Drawing on the various types of social capital, it appears that the types of 'outcomes' achieved by these relationships/connections ultimately depend on the context/circumstances. Sidloyi (2010) reveals that the quantity of social capital an individual possesses directly correlates with the ability to establish social networks and sustain them. Having some type of 'resource' that one is able to 'offer in return' is essential if one is establishing social connections with the 'right people/groups/institutions' in the hope of benefitting from the resources that are available from such networks.

It begs the questions, assuming that receiving a certain kind of social capital depends on an individual's social position and what that particular individual is able to offer to the group: How does social capital benefit those individuals/groups who have no 'resources' to 'offer in return' but who are desperate to achieve a particular goal? How does social capital account for the power imbalance in this particular context? Indeed, not everybody who capitalises on their position of power to produce positive outcomes wants something in return, but it appears that there is an element of 'exclusivity' in terms of membership to a particular group and the benefits reaped from this association based on individual capital.

Gauntlett (2011) highlights that Bourdieu's concept of social capital is used to identify and explain how social inequalities emerge as a result of the structural set-up of society and, more importantly, how certain social groups are able to preserve and maintain their social positions. According to Gillies and Edwards (2006), Bourdieu's concept of social capital is tied to human and economic capital and he argued that access to these different forms of capital will determine the position of individuals within the social structure. Human capital consists of skills, knowledge and education, while economic capital comprises money and financial resources (Martikke, 2017). Bourdieu also believes that capital is directly linked to certain social positions, and since certain social groups are systematically marginalised by the system from accessing resources and opportunities, Bourdieu emphasises that social capital works to perpetuate social inequality (Gillies and Edwards, 2006; Lin, 2000).

Johnson (2004) emphasises that people who share similar backgrounds and resources are more inclined to socialise with each other than with individuals from other levels within this social structure, which forms the foundation of strong relations between individuals. Moreover, the author emphasises that different resources lie beyond an individual's social network but also on a different level in the hierarchy, and if an individual requires access to resources higher up in the hierarchy they must utilize their weak relations to achieve this goal (Sandefur and Laumann, 1998 cited in Johnson, 2004). Thus, having access to these resources not only depends on where one is situated within the social structure but also on establishing a relationship with the individual who holds that specific resource.

According to (Thieme, 2006; Edwards *et al*, 2003), since social capital is characterised as the exchange of resources between individuals and wider networks for mutual benefit, the implication is that there are obligations, trust and expectations between individuals in the group, which are deemed critical if any transaction is going to take place. Nevertheless,

(Edwards *et al*, 2003) emphasises that the family is an important source of social capital and the ability to transmit social capital to children is determined by the parent's individual capital, which in turn gives rise to children establishing their own social capital networks. That said, a collapse in the structure of the family will significantly reduce social capital and, at the same time, it may also push individuals to access resources from outside their immediate group (Edwards *et al*, 2003).

A study conducted by Ciabattari (2005), focusing on single mothers, social capital and work-family conflict, found 80% of single mothers were able to depend on someone to provide financial assistance, a place of residence and childcare. The researcher's sample consisted of both low- and higher-income women and the findings emphasise that access to these resources was easier for the higher-income women. The researcher emphasises that social capital provides important resources for single mothers as they fulfil multiple roles. Furthermore, the author stresses that for low-income single mothers experiencing work-family conflict, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain employment, which significantly contributes to unemployment amongst this group – while higher-income single mothers are more likely to manage work-family conflict by not working, because they possess the resources to do so.

Not only does religion form the backbone of society, it's also considered to be an important source of social capital. In attempts to conceptualise religion, Mason, Schmidt and Mennis (2012) distinguish between three dimensions of religiosity, namely social religiosity, perceived religiosity and private religiosity. According to Mason *et al* (2012), social religiosity is associated with the public aspects of religious practise, which includes church attendance and participation within religious institutions. Perceived religiosity has to do with

the sense of social and material support received by the religious community, whereas private religiosity emanates from the beliefs, value systems and practises of the individual.

Maselko, Hughes and Cheney (2011) describe religious social capital as resources that are available to individuals through relationships with their religious community. Barker and Smith (2010) highlight that religious social capital generally outlines an individual's religious beliefs and traditions, and that the maintenance thereof automatically results in the accumulation of social capital over time. Sohail, Haq and Munawar (2016) emphasise that the origin of social capital and religious social capital are generated via the same network. The authors stress the importance of the family, extended relatives and the wider community in not only producing social capital, but also introducing religion by instilling, transmitting and cultivating religious teachings and traditions. Sohail *et al* (2016) emphasised that a relationship of dependency and control exists between religion and the family.

While religion plays a critical role in the socialisation process, religion also provides a standard against which behaviour, world views and value systems are assessed. The authors highlight that adherence to a particular faith is accompanied by certain value and belief systems in accordance with that faith, and that the moral obligation of church members to uphold these religious teachings and traditions are shaped by incentives and sanctions (Sohail *et al*, 2016). Consequently, religious teachings and traditions ensure a common sense of identity amongst members, which is manifested not only in the quality of social relations but also in moral conduct, participation in civil society, ensuring solidarity and the development of trust amongst members (Halman and Luijkx, 2006).

Furseth (2008) reveals that different religious communities generate different types of social capital, and that in certain religious communities, social economic status directly influences the types and availability of social capital. Drawing on the work of Fitzpatrick and Lagory

(2000, cited in Mason *et al*, 2012), the author emphasises the capacity of religious institutions in providing social services to combat the constraints imposed upon social welfare agencies. A study conducted by Mason *et al* (2012) illustrated the importance of religion and religious commitment in combating substance abuse in adolescents, and the authors reported that those devoted to their religion are less likely to engage in risky/impulsive behaviour. Furthermore, the authors ascribed positive outcomes to the role that religious commitment plays within underprivileged communities.

Interestingly, Furseth (2008) highlights the negative forms of social capital generated by religious communities, which manifest in the exclusion of outsiders. Also, the social capital generated becomes exclusively reserved for members who belong to a particular faith community. And in addition, the author emphasises that the sense of connectedness amongst members belonging to a particular religious community imposes on an individual's independence by way of the pressure and obligation to uphold and conform to the norms of the group.

Depending on the social position that single parents find themselves in, it appears that most single-parent families experience lower levels of social capital, because the social circles and supportive networks of most single-parent families are often limited. While social capital is concerned with establishing and maintaining social relations, factors such as loneliness, shame, discrimination and stigmatising attitudes certainly contribute and trigger feelings of isolation and exclusion amongst single parents in terms of developing meaningful social relationships and seeking support within the church. While the church provides a platform to establish social capital, the above-mentioned factors could also deny single parents the opportunity to establish a supportive network within the church because certain social groups such as the single parents are still being ostracised. Therefore, the perceptions/attitudes

towards single parents could either encourage or prevent single parents from obtaining support through social capital. While building trust is an important foundation in developing social relationships, it also appears that dual roles, challenges and constraints associated with single parents' families don't always afford single parents the opportunity to engage and form support networks. It also appears that some single parents are cautious about disclosing their circumstances to church leaders/congregants for fear of being ridiculed, which could negatively impact and limit their access to social capital. This is one of the reasons why single parents often suffer in silence.



CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, there appears to be a wealth of literature on studies devoted to religion and single parenting. However, only one such study has been conducted in South Africa, within the Limpopo Province. This demonstrates that there is still a neglected body of knowledge concerning the subject matter. The following literature review begins by addressing the issue of single parenting on a local and international level, in which the definition, the prevalence, the effects and socio-economic support structures of single-parent households are further discussed. Thereafter the review addresses the role that religion plays within the lives of single parents, in which prevailing societal perceptions, single parenting as a measure of moral character and the degree to which the church becomes a source of support are further explored.

3.2 MAPPING SINGLE PARENTING

Attempts at defining single parenting don't come without their challenges. There is no sole criterion that determines who and when it's considered appropriate to identify as a single parent, however the modern era has certainly paved the way for new family forms to develop and it seems that there are cultural conditions applicable to the definition of being a single parent. The cultural understanding regarding the definition of 'single parent' used to be confined to previously-married-but-divorced couples who bore children together. Single

parenting takes on diverse labels across different cultures and the transitions in the definition of a single parent directly correlates with social policies. Moreover, the prevailing misconceptions or stereotypes of single parenting that are perpetuated and overlooked, largely restrict this phenomenon to women (Rand, 2014).

A study conducted in Nigeria showed that although single parenthood is perceived as a product of witchcraft, it is rapidly becoming more widespread, especially amongst women (Essien and Bassey, 2012). The authors reveal that polygamy, domestic violence, emotional abuse and adultery in particular are some of the factors that influence the decision to become single parents amongst women in Nigeria. In fact, Essien and Bassey (2012) emphasise that many women want to break the cultural stereotypes surrounding culturally-assigned gender roles – they acknowledge that they “*can’t live under a man*”, detest and reject adultery, and refuse to rear children in those circumstances. These views have resulted in the emergence of “*voluntary single parenthood*” amongst women in Nigeria. The authors stress that industrialisation, female participation in the workforce and the empowerment of women have made the maintenance and survival of single-parent families possible in Nigeria.

Interestingly, they also highlight that single-parent families are ‘self-replicating’, and that because of weak father-child relationships, this family form is becoming a matriarchal tradition (Essien and Bassey, 2012). The authors also found that advanced reproductive technology and women refusing to disclose their pregnancy are contributing to the social phenomena of “*voluntary single parenthood*” in Nigeria.

In South Africa, single parenting can take different forms, however it is more widespread amongst women. As previously mentioned, the social standing of an individual is significant when making generalisations about single-parent households, especially households operated by females, as Sidloyi (2010) highlighted in her study. A family form that is currently

emerging in South Africa is the child-headed household. According to Van Breda (n.d.), a child-headed household is defined as “*a family that lives living under the same roof, which is headed by a person under the age of 18*”. The author emphasises that HIV/AIDS and ill-health are among the main factors that give rise to this family form, and according to the author, most parents affected by HIV/AIDS have children who consequently become orphans (Pharoah 2001, cited in Van Breda, n.d.). Van Breda makes a further distinction between the “*types*” of orphans: “*maternal orphans*” refers to children whose mothers have died, and “*social orphans*” refers to children whose parents have abandoned them. In South Africa, an orphan is recognised as “*a child who has no surviving parent caring for him or her*” (South African Government, 2005 Section, cited in Van Breda, n.d.). It was also established that child-headed households are a temporary solution in the face of family disruption. In other circumstances, extended family relatives living in close proximity would offer emotional support and financial assistance (Van Breda, n.d.). Sudden adjustment in roles, emotional distress, economic vulnerability, sexual exploitation, food insecurity and educational attainment were the major concerns surrounding child-headed households (Van Breda, n.d.).

Another emerging family form that is constantly scrutinised, berated and stigmatised is the same-sex family which is formed through homosexual relationships (Kidd, Czerniawski and Abbott, 2003). In western societies where heteronormativity and the heteronormative-nuclear family was romanticised as the norm and long thought to be the most desirable setting beneficial for child development. Consequently, homosexuals found themselves being victimised, marginalised and oppressed by society and its institutions to the extent that homosexuality was classified as a psychiatric disorder, with many homosexuals unjustly detained and institutionalised (Lubbe, 2007).

A South African study conducted by Morison and Lynch (n.d.), focusing on gay men as parents and caregivers, found that same-sex families are either formed by gay couples, adoption or surrogacy. The authors identified that traditionally, same-sex families were formed by having children through heterosexual relationships, but innovation in medical technologies and transitions in legislation, coupled with a change in attitudes towards same-sex families, has afforded gay couples opportunities to become parents. The transition has taken place despite conflicting views towards homosexuality, and the authors emphasise that these pathways to parenthood certainly pose economic challenges for those who cannot access the necessary resources. In addition, the authors noted that many gay men have experienced discrimination in healthcare regarding their desire to have children.

Despite these recent developments, many still can't seem to fathom that gay men are capable of being parents, which stems from the obsession with the heterosexual relationship being 'normal' and the misconception that only women are capable of being mothers. Another important issue is the concern by some for the adverse effects that homosexuality would have on children and its influences on how children would construct their identity and define their sexual orientation, as well as the negative depictions, societal perceptions and stigma they would be exposed to on the grounds that their family structure is considered different and a violation of the norm (Morison and Lynch, n.d.).

The household headed by a single father is another emerging family form, and a study conducted by Livingston (2013) found that in the United States 8% of households with minors are headed by single fathers. The author reveals that single fathers are more inclined to cohabit, earn high levels of income and to be older, and less inclined to experience poverty and have lower levels of education. Single fathers are also more inclined to be white than is the case with single mothers, and the author makes a further distinction, that cohabiting single

fathers are more inclined to experience poverty, have lower levels of education and be younger than single fathers who raise children alone. Furthermore, the author found that Hispanic and black men are more likely to be co-habiting single fathers, while white men account for the majority of single fathers who rear children in the absence of a spouse/partner. The author highlights that non-marital birth and changes in legislation have also contributed to the emergence of households headed by single fathers.

3.3 THE PREVALENCE OF SINGLE PARENTING

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2011), 15% of children worldwide live in single-parent households, and women head-up approximately 85% of these households. Furthermore, the countries with the highest percentage of single parents consist of the USA, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada and the UK. While according to the 2012 census, 22% of single parents in American households are white, while 57% of single-parent households in the USA are African-American with 33% Hispanic (The Spaced Out Scientist, 2015).

According to statistics in South Africa, nearly 100 000 children live in child-headed households (Jones, 2011:2). An investigation by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) revealed that 39% of the country's children reside with their mothers while 4% reside with single fathers, 8 % of children reside with grandparents and extended family members, while one million children have lost both parents to HIV/AIDS. The researchers also stressed that children who operate households are at greater risk of being exploited, living in poverty and being unemployed, while children who reside with both biological parents are less inclined to become teenage parents, less inclined to use drugs, and more inclined to excel academically (Jones, 2011; News24, 2013).

3.4 THE EFFECTS OF SINGLE PARENTING

Werkerle (1985) found that financial constraints severely affected divorced mothers' living arrangements – to the extent that many have lost their social networks and support structures as a result. McLanahan (1997, cited in Schwartz , 2003) argues that children from absent-father homes are more inclined to develop behavioural problems, including physical aggression and fighting. In addition, family disorganisation has been conceptualised as a major precursor to juvenile and adult violence (Schwartz, 2003). The effects of single parenting manifest within, resulting in psychological turmoil, school absenteeism, higher school drop-out rates, lower levels of education and behavioural problems (Stephen and Udisi, 2016).

According to Drefrain and Eirick (1981), single mothers are more likely to have lower levels of education and poor-paying jobs than single men. Moreover, single mothers are confronted with feelings of isolation, loneliness, and are often stigmatized by society. Wood (2010) found that although more fathers are becoming involved in raising their children, fathers still find it difficult to adopt the roles of both mom and dad. In addition, many fathers are still being stigmatized because they do not embody the personal characteristics to adequately fulfil their parental duties insofar as providing a warm, nurturing and caring environment for their kids. This widespread notion certainly cannot be generalised, and not all single mothers are capable of providing emotional support to their children. Furthermore, Wood (2010) notes that many fathers are concerned that their children will disobey them, and they find it increasingly difficult to discuss certain topics (such as puberty) with children. The challenges that single fathers endure become more apparent when they are raising daughters, especially when daughters navigate through adolescence and are baffled by their self-image, puberty-

related issues, and peer pressure in their attempts to fit in and establish their identity (Wood, 2010).

3.5 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Williams (2012) found that previous publications focusing on the effects that single parenting have on children are largely focused on female-headed households. Further investigation revealed that while most children from single-parent households reside with the mother, there's a gradual increase in the number of children residing with their fathers. The transition in the family structure certainly has implications for the financial security of children, as single-parent households are more prone to experience poverty (Williams, 2012).

Williams (2012) found that single mothers who lack financial resources are more likely to reside with their parents to minimise the effects of poverty on themselves and their children, and because their parents also became a source of childcare. Single fathers are more inclined to have higher levels of education and earn higher levels of income, heading up households in which children are less inclined to experience poverty than is the case with single mothers (Williams, 2012). Garasky and Meyer (1996) discovered that poor male-headed households are less inclined to receive public assistance, and that healthcare becomes inaccessible to children from poor male-headed households. It was also found that for female-headed households, public assistance and accessibility to healthcare is mostly determined by status. According to Weinraub (1983), single parents tend to be more isolated than married parents, as the social network and support structures decrease after couples separate.

In the South African context, a study conducted by Wright, Noble, Phakama, Barnes and Neves (2013) found that the large majority of single mothers in South Africa live in

households that received at least one child-support grant. Wright et al (2013) also found that a small proportion of single mothers lived in households where a disability grant was received. According to Nkosi (2011, cited in Khosa and Kaseke, 2017), the child-support grant is the main form of social assistance from the state for low-income families in South Africa and, more importantly, for many single-parent families. According to Khosa and Kaseke (2017) the child support grant reduces food insecurity and provides women with financial independence. The department of Social Development (2004, cited in Khosa and Kaseke, 2017) found that the child support grant reduces poverty and hunger, and increases school attendance.

3.6 RELIGION, MORALITY AND SINGLE PARENTING

As much as religion carries many positive connotations, there's no denying that many have their reservations when it comes to religious teachings or doctrines concerning controversial issues. Insofar as the literature has illustrated the importance and positive influences that the church bestows upon single parents, literature has also revealed the damaging effects that single parents are confronted with in the context of the church. An important question that needs to be asked is: Should single parenting be a 'measure' of morality?

By and large, societal perceptions of single parenting appear to be a matter of 'double standards', as evident in the work of Goldscheider and Kaufman (2006). They found that most people disapprove of unmarried mothers insofar as perceiving the female-headed household as "*detrimental*", while single fathers who are successfully raising children are praised and highly regarded. Usually, society is quick to make judgements, even though one is not always aware of the circumstances that give rise to single parenthood, even though certain circumstances are beyond one's control and not necessarily a violation of what is

written in the bible. The concept of marriage is an important value that is taught and cultivated within the Christian faith, but with changes in society there has been a shift away from traditional belief systems and practises, especially for women.

Essien and Bassey (2012) draw attention to the fact that there are many women who are single parents by choice in what is also referred to as “*voluntary single motherhood*”. The authors make a further distinction that some in the case of women who are socialized to be mothers but not particularly attracted to the idea of marriage, they may resort to advanced reproductive technologies to fulfil this desire. As a result, the emergence of “*voluntary single parents*” will render implications for the way single parenting – specifically a single mother – is perceived within the context of the church, because of a tendency within the church to equate single mothers with being “*improper*” where sexuality is concerned. According to Essien and Bassey (2012:248): “*Single mothers are demonized as being promiscuous.*”

Similar views are evident in the work of Makbuhele (2008), who discovered that many in the congregation, including church leaders, are suspicious of single mothers, because they perceive single mothers to have “*hidden agendas*” insofar as even “*seducing*” other members of the congregation. Makhubele (2008) found that single mothers felt unaccepted by the church – to the extent that many were inclined to leave the church. Moreover, a study conducted by (Winniefred, 2015) found that church leaders would encourage single parents to “*pray harder*” and “*faster*” so that they can rid themselves of demonic spirits that push men away.

“Fruge (n.d.) found that many individuals are reluctant to send their children to church for fear that the church will implant negative perceptions of single-parent families. It was also noted that single parents often feel marginalized and stigmatised within the church, with

single parents under the impression that the church is “*reserved*” for married couples (Fruge, n.d.).

Despite these negative perceptions, the stress of work, family life and household responsibilities lead many single mothers to turn to religion as a source of support to cope with these daily challenges (Sheets, 2014). In addition, religious involvement has been associated with nurturing family bonds and encouraging social interaction with others outside the church. Further investigation reveals that frequent church attendance amongst single mothers has been associated with an increase in their social network, which is rather beneficial when it comes to parenting-related issues (Sheets, 2014). Brodsky (1999, cited in Sheets, 2014) found the church to be a source of material support in which food and clothing are distributed to minimise the challenges that come with single parenting. It has also been discovered that a positive correlation exists between religion, mental health and physical health, in which those devoted to their religion tend to be better off mentally and physically as far as single parenting is concerned (Sheets, 2014).

In the Malaysian society, similar findings were found by Yasin and Jani (2013), with single mothers stigmatised and accused of seducing men into marriage. According to Yasin and Jani (2013), pregnancy-out-of-wedlock and prostitution are the leading causes of single parenthood in Malaysia. The authors also emphasise that in Malaysia the virginity of women is one of the factors taken into consideration before marriage, and based on this “*requirement*” single mothers hamper their chances of ever getting married. Because of this, as Yasin and Jani (2013) point out, the practical benefits that polygamy has within the Muslim society in Malaysia and advocate that polygamy is the best solution to all the challenges single mothers are confronted with in that country.

According to Yasin and Jani (2013), polygamy is perceived as a way of providing protection and financial support to single mothers, widows and single women who have passed the age of marrying. The authors stressed that polygamy operates as a protective factor against the involvement of women in various crimes such as prostitution, drug and human trafficking, drug abuse, gambling and abortions, but also various socio-economic problems endured by single mothers and widows. In short, Yasin and Jani (2013) are confident that all the financial and emotional needs of single mothers and widows will be fulfilled through polygamous marriages.

However, while polygamous marriages might be seen as a solution to single motherhood in Malaysia according to the authors (Yasin and Jani, 2013), one still cannot guarantee that women won't be abused or exploited within these marriages. Also, what about single fathers in Malaysia? Are there any approaches to addressing the challenges of single fatherhood within the Malaysian society?

In India, according to the Refugee Review Tribunal (2011), single mothers are subjected to discrimination, abuse, sexual and physical assault and harassment, even from their family. Furthermore, single mothers in India are stigmatised, rejected, often unemployed, have lower levels of education and their mobility is restricted (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2011).

According to the Refugee Review Tribunal (2011), single mothers in India often live in fear of being dispossessed of their land and shelter. It has also been reported that the state does not provide social assistance or access to healthcare for single mothers in India (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2011).

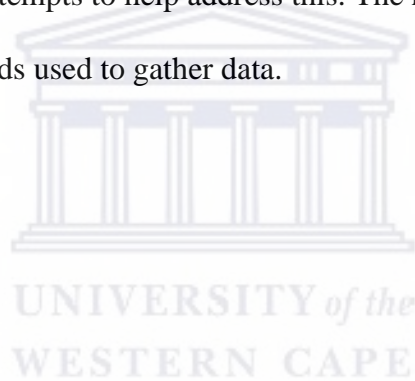
Crimes perpetrated against women in India, especially those against single mothers, are barely investigated by law enforcement (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2011). It appears that single mothers in India are a neglected part of society and are left to fend for themselves

against the very institutions that are supposed to protect single mothers and ensure their interests, wellbeing and safety.

On the whole, it appears that around the world, some of the challenges experienced by single parents are quite similar, regardless of religious affiliation.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of key studies on the topic of single parenthood and identified the main themes discussed by the respective authors. A shortage of local studies was identified and this thesis attempts to help address this. The next chapter describes the research process and the methods used to gather data.



CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an explanation of the methodology used in this research by highlighting the research design, sampling technique, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative approach in the form of an exploratory study was utilised in conducting this research. Shank (2002: 5) defined qualitative research “*as a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning*”. Qualitative research designs are meticulous and usually lend themselves to the understanding and interpretation of the social and subjective worlds of individuals. Reiter (2013) argues that exploration bestows greater expectations upon researchers, because researchers must be prepared to immerse themselves in different cultures and languages while simultaneously engaging in critical self-reflection and critique. By virtue of exploratory research generating qualitative information, interviews and surveys are frequently employed as methods of data collection (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). According to Manerikar and Manerikar (2014) exploratory research is valuable when a researcher has limited experience or knowledge about a research issue. Furthermore, exploratory studies bring forth new ideas and impart a better understanding of a specific phenomenon. Due to the nature of the proposed topic and the lack of literature within a South

African context, the use of exploratory research is appropriate as it yields the foundation upon which the researcher is able to address the gaps in literature, enhance their knowledge and shed new light in understanding how single parenting is perceived within the context of the church. The valuable information generated through this exploratory study will play a pivotal role in the ways that the church could be more supportive and accommodative towards single parents within the congregation.

4.3 PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

According to Patton (2002, cited in Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan and Hoagwood, 2015), purposive sampling is frequently employed during qualitative research with the objective of identifying and selecting “*information-rich cases*” related to the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, purposive sampling enables the researcher to assemble a group of individuals/participants who possess the knowledge and relevant characteristics vital for conducting the research. Palpys (2008) emphasised that it is critically important for researchers employing this sampling technique to be aware of and understand what they’d like to know and accomplish from their research.

According to McCabe and Macnee (2008), purposive sampling is used when the target audience is difficult to access. They found purposive sampling to be a labour-saving and time-efficient method of finding research participants by discarding those who aren’t suitable for the study. While the congregations of these churches are relatively big, employing purposive sampling helped the researcher locate the single parents within the congregation much quicker with the help of the church leaders/pastors who acted as gatekeepers in this process. Purposive sampling also enabled the researcher to enlist both the church leaders and

single parents who embodied the knowledge and life experience needed to shed light on the topic.

Each church was issued with a gatekeeper letter (addressed to each respective church leader/pastor) requesting permission to conduct the study and to recruit potential research participants. Upon receiving the letter, an additional meeting was scheduled with each church leader/pastor to provide more information about the study and the researcher met with all of the church leaders/pastors at the respective churches. Since the target group of the research study is a marginalised group, and to ensure that identifying this group of participants remained discreet, the researcher and the church leaders/pastors reached an agreement that the church leaders/pastors would provide the researcher with the names and contact details of all the single parents within the congregation.

Following the meetings with the church leaders/pastors, an approval letter (addressed to the researcher) was issued by each church providing permission and access to the church.

Once the researcher obtained the contact details of the single parents, the researcher proceeded to contact each participant telephonically in order to inform the single parents of the study and to request their permission to participate in the research.

Participants were recruited from three churches located in Kuils River. More specifically, the denominations included the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church and the Charismatic Church. The sample included single mothers and single fathers (over 20 years old) who attended church regularly and the respective church leaders were also interviewed. A total of twenty-one (21) participants were purposively selected for the interview process. Due to the fact that of the single parents only three males were willing to participate, female single parents formed the majority of the single-parent sample in this study. Initially, the researcher intended to recruit thirty (30) single parents across the three denominations with the aim of

enlisting between eight and ten (8-10) single parents per church, however due to circumstances beyond the researcher's control, eventually only seventeen (17) single parents took part in the study. The researcher also intended to involve a focus group with the church leaders/pastors across the respective churches, however due to time constraints and tight schedules, the number of church leaders/pastors across the three churches who were interviewed was limited to four (4). As a result, collectively twenty-one (21) participants were interviewed.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION

According to Mathers, Fox and Hunn (1998): *“The interview is a dominant data gathering technique that is characterized by verbal communication between the researcher and the subject and is predominantly utilized within survey designs, descriptive and exploratory studies.”* Boyce and Neale (2006) maintain that in-depth interviews are valuable in attempts to investigate and explore ideas while eliciting information about a subject's behaviour as well as subjective views and experiences in relation to a specific phenomenon. Furthermore, the quality of the information obtained directly correlates with the interview style as well as the researcher's skills and expertise. Open-mindedness, vigilance, patience, diligence, curiosity, active listening and devotion to the field of enquiry are amongst some of the qualities that researchers should embody (Stefanadis, 2006). Hence, it is imperative that the researcher is appropriately trained in their duties and equipped with the skills, knowledge and personal characteristics necessary to administer the interviews.

For this study, semi-structured, in-depth interviews consisting of open-ended questions were conducted with each participant. Since two groups were interviewed, both the church leaders and single parents had their own set of questions, each constructed in accordance with the

aims and objectives of the study. The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed participants the chance to actively participate in the interview, while enabling the researcher to ask probing questions in cases of uncertainty (Mathers et al, 1998). The interviews were conducted face-to-face and, due to the nature of the topic, this method of data collection created a safe and comfortable environment which afforded participants the opportunity to openly express their views and engage with the researcher. Administering the interviews face-to-face also made it possible for the researcher to observe the facial expressions and body language of the participants, which adds value to the interpretation of the findings (Opdenakker, 2006).

Once the single parents and church leaders provided the researcher with their consent to participate in the study, the researcher proceeded to contact the church leaders as well as the single parents individually, in order to establish a suitable date and time to conduct the interview. Some interviews were conducted in public spaces, while others were either conducted at the homes of the single parents or at their place of work, as requested by the single parents. The church leaders/pastors were interviewed individually at the church or their offices. Since all of the participants are fully employed, most of the participants could only avail themselves to be interviewed in the evening. The researcher would text each participant an evening prior to the interview, requesting their home/work address and reminding them of the interview.

Upon arriving at the church/ home/office of the participant, the researcher would provide the participant with an information sheet and a consent form. Following this, the researcher would set aside 10 to 15 minutes for the participant to read through and sign the forms. Participants were informed of their right to abandon the interview process and to signal to the researcher if they felt uncomfortable at any time during the interview. The researcher would

proceed to ask the participant if they felt comfortable and to begin an audio recording of the interview using a laptop or an app on a mobile device, i.e. with all of the participants having graciously consented to the recordings. Once each interview was completed, the researcher proceeded to save the recording, concluding the interview by expressing gratitude to the participant for partaking in the study and by providing information regarding counselling services, should the participant require such additional support.

The interviews were recorded for the purpose of transcription and data analysis. Most of the church leaders and single parents were short on time and had other obligations to attend to after coming home from work, and recording the interview was time-efficient in these circumstances. Most of the interviews were between 20 and 30 minutes long, and all the interviews were conducted in English.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS


According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 6): “*Thematic analysis is defined as a method used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within the data.*” Barnard and Ryan (2003) advocated a procedure in carrying out data analysis which involves the following: identifying themes and sub-themes and determining which themes are most important, constructing a hierarchy of themes and linking themes to theoretical frameworks. Themes emerge from data and the researchers’ preconceived knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Barnard and Ryan, 2008).

Furthermore, repetition was described as one of the easiest ways of determining themes, emphasising that the more frequently a concept emerges, the more likely it is to be a theme. According to Alhojailan (2012), since qualitative research must be able to depict

interpretations using the collected data, thematic analysis is able to identify any factors that could have influenced information gathered from the research participants. In addition, thematic analysis is described as being appropriate when the aim of the investigation is to explore the current practises of any individual (Alhojailan, 2012). Thus, thematic analysis is beneficial in its ability to provide rich, detailed descriptions and a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation.

Following the interview process, all 21 interviews were manually transcribed. Thereafter, the information was coded and grouped together according to specific themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. The themes presented reflect the aims and objectives of the study.

4.6 ETHICS



Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2001) maintain that although qualitative studies are typically administered within natural settings, participation should be purely voluntary. Therefore, as a researcher hoping to make a positive contribution to society, it is my moral obligation to respect and protect the rights of the research participants. Upon completion of the written proposal, it was submitted to the University's Ethics Committee, to receive ethical clearance. Once the research was cleared and ethical approval obtained, the researcher proceeded with the process of data collection. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and participants who were keen to participate were provided with extensive information about the study, the aims and objectives as well as the various procedures involved. Consent was requested from the willing participants, who were provided with an information sheet highlighting their rights. To fulfil the ethical requirements, each participant was contacted individually by the researcher to inform them about the study, request each participant's

permission to partake in the study, and to highlight what was expected of the participants if they agreed to participate within the study before scheduling a suitable date, time and location with each of the participants to conduct the interviews. To ensure anonymity, no names were used in this research. To exercise confidentiality, all of the data collected was stored in a safe place only accessible to the researcher. Once the data was received, it was transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis.

Since this study is confined to the single-parent family, it does not come without certain implications towards potential research participants. Are single parents vulnerable? One cannot dispute that single parents are a marginalised group, but that does not imply that all single parents are vulnerable. When we refer to single parents as being ‘vulnerable’, are we formulating assumptions based on their social position within society? Does single parents’ being ‘vulnerable’ encompass the ‘negative’ experiences/events that they’ve encountered before they became single parents?

The reason why people are single parents might also be of a sensitive nature to some of them, which could also tie-in with being ‘vulnerable’. Nevertheless, not all single parents consider themselves vulnerable, despite the circumstances they find themselves in. Moreover, there are single parents who are economically advantaged, who have access to resources and who are successful, all of which are protective factors in coping with single parenting.

Participants were reminded that if they felt uncomfortable at any point during the interview process, they were allowed to withdraw from the study. In this regard, an appropriate referral was made to the Usapho Foundation for counselling if participants felt that they were negatively affected by the interview. Also noteworthy is the challenge(s) involved in obtaining permission from and gaining access to the churches: the respective church leaders had initially granted access to the church for the interviews to be conducted there, however

access was later revoked and the researcher had to find an alternative venue/location to conduct the interviews. Another factor to consider was that some participants were hesitant to disclose certain types of information, concerned about speaking negatively about the church/church leaders.

4.7 REFLEXIVITY

According to Gouldner (1971, cited in Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas and Caricativo, 2017: 427), reflexivity pertains to the “*analytic attention to the researcher’s role in qualitative research*”. In other words, reflexivity denotes the extent to which researchers are active participants in their own right and the extent to which they influence the research process (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2002). There is no denying that single parenting is becoming more prevalent in South Africa, however, as a researcher and somebody who resides with a single parent, I am aware of my emotional connection to this topic and that it is still a sensitive issue for many people. I’m also aware that my circumstance helped build a rapport with the study participants. Yet it was in my best interest to maintain objectivity throughout the research process as I explored the subjective worlds of the research participants and tried to provide accurate and objective accounts of their experiences.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the methods used by the researcher in gathering the data in which systematic accounts of the research process and data collection of the study was explained. The research procedure, sampling techniques, data analysis, data collection, reflexivity and

ethical considerations of the study was thoroughly explored. The findings of the study are presented in chapter five, followed by a discussion and summary of the results.



CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the information collected during the interviews that were administered to single parents and respective church leaders. A total of twenty-one (21) participants were interviewed. The findings will reflect the themes that have been identified and the quotes used are stated verbatim.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF SINGLE PARENTS

Although interviews were conducted with both single parents and church leaders, biographic information was obtained from the single parents only. The criteria for the study consisted of single mothers and fathers (over 20 years old) who attended church within the Kuils River community. The study was conducted across three churches of different denominations in the Kuils River area.

Participants comprised of single mothers and single fathers. There were twelve (12) 'Coloured' single mothers and three (3) 'Coloured' single fathers. There was one (1) 'Indian' single mother and one (1) 'Black' single mother. All of the single parents were employed, reside within the Kuils River area and attended church on a regular basis. Additionally, four (4) pastors/church leaders representing the three churches selected interviewed individually.

Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Occupation	Religious Denomination	Structure of Household
Participant 1	Male	Coloured	33	Internal Sales Clerk	Charismatic	Lives with one child and five extended family relatives
Participant 2	Male	Coloured	43	Operations Manager	Charismatic	Lives alone Three children who visit regularly
Participant 3	Female	Coloured	53	Administrator	Charismatic	Lives alone Two children
Participant 4	Male	Coloured	46	Technician	Charismatic	Lives alone One child
Participant 5	Female	Coloured	32	Sales Consultant	Methodist	Lives with two children and three extended family relatives
Participant 6	Female	Coloured	32	Receptionist	Anglican	Lives with two children and six extended family relatives
Participant 7	Female	Coloured	58	Operations Auditor	Methodist	Lives alone Two children
Participant 8	Female	Coloured	41	Police Official	Charismatic	Lives alone Two children
Participant 9	Female	Coloured	56	Finance and Creditors Consultant	Methodist	Lives alone Two children
Participant 10	Female	Black	39	Admin Clerk	Charismatic	Lives alone Two children
Participant 11	Female	Coloured	51	Medical Administrator	Methodist	Lives with three children and one extended family relative

Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Occupation	Religious Denomination	Structure of Household
Participant 12	Female	Coloured	38	Social Worker	Charismatic	Lives alone One child
Participant 13	Female	Coloured	39	Office Manager	Methodist	Lives alone One child
Participant 14	Female	Coloured	36	Office Assistant	Anglican	Lives alone One child
Participant 15	Female	Coloured	40	Property Manager	Charismatic	Lives alone Two children
Participant 16	Female	Coloured	59	Nurse	Methodist	Lives alone Two children
Participant 17	Female	Indian	48	Data Analyst	Charismatic	Lives with one child and two extended family relatives

5.2.1 Analysis

All 21 interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. While single parenting is a complex and ever-growing phenomenon, it appeared that this group of individuals was still overlooked and largely misunderstood within the context of the church. There are various prominent themes and sub-themes within the data, which will be further discussed, and thematic analysis allows the researcher the platform to deconstruct and analyse the subjective accounts of the topic under investigation. The main themes are numbered and the sub-themes are underlined.

5.3 SUBJECTIVE VIEWS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SINGLE PARENTING

While the underlying question is directed at both single parents and church leaders, this theme looks specifically at the perceptions and attitudes surrounding single parenting. The main issues raised by the participants are: resilience, guilt and sympathy, challenging and demanding, and moral obligation.

5.3.1 Resilience

Transitioning to single parenthood brings about its own set of challenges and most of the participants indicated that single parenting both forces and encourages one to become resilient. This finding is supported by Cheeseman (2010), who found that resilience motivates single mothers to deal with adversity.

Developing survival strategies to navigate the challenges of single parenthood resulted in a sense of personal growth for some single parents. For example, one single father reported that: *“It’s been a learning curve. I think it causes you to grow, it stretches your resilience, because there’s things that you thought that you were never able to do on your own and then you find out... wow I am actually doing this on my own.”* This finding supports Cheeseman (2010), who found that the experiences of single parenthood evoked feelings of strength and determination in single mothers. Some participants in this study reiterated the importance of having a support structure and acknowledged that being a single parent takes a great deal of strength. In other cases, participants said that single parenting afforded them an opportunity to take responsibility and bring about change, not only in their choices but also in their lifestyles. For example, two participants indicated that they had to rid themselves of their substance addiction because they refused to expose their children to those self-destructive habits.

In light of the above, it appears that resilience plays a pivotal role in adjusting to single parenthood, whether or not those single parents have restricted access to social capital. Whilst those single parents who have a support structure – as did many participants in this study – have access to resources through social capital that they can capitalise on, making the process of single parenthood more manageable during times of distress. According to Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000: 229, cited in Yosso, 2005), resilience is “*a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover or thrive after stressful events but to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent function*”. Nonetheless, resilience transcends social capital and even without access or with restricted access to social capital, resilience is key to overcoming adversities for single parents. In line with resilience, many of the participants reported that single parenting has been a “*source of encouragement*”, with a few of the single parents acknowledging their children as the main driving force behind their motivation to push through adversity.

5.3.2 Guilt and Sympathy

Gearing and Campbell (2000) reported that single mothers raising sons often experience feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy. Based on this view, it appears that a few single parent participants (both male and female) who participated in this study are confronted by feelings of sympathy and guilt. One single mother reported that since her husband passed away, she has experienced feelings of guilt whenever she “*plays wrestling*” with her son, emphasising that it is not her duty as a mother to instil masculine traits in her son.

One single father reported: “*Sometimes you feel sorry for the kids, especially me as a father, now that I found since the mother is not there I tend to let a lot of things slide which is wrong, but I do it because there is no mother present.*” It appears that feelings of guilt and sympathy influence how some participants manage behavioural challenges, with two single parents

acknowledging that they tended to overlook their children's challenging behaviour, even though they should not. So, is it easier for single parents to process the guilt or the ramifications of single parenthood by overlooking the behaviour of their children in certain instances? Or does overlooking the behaviour of the children compensate for the guilt, sympathy and inadequacy that some single parents are experiencing?

Based on the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants, it appears that both male and female single parents are confronted with similar experiences and challenges – as mentioned above – during certain phases of single parenthood. While females represent the majority of the single parent population in this study, and based on the results, it appears that there is little variation in some of the challenges experienced by both male and female single parents.

5.3.3 Challenging and Demanding

With a limited support system, participants emphasised that single parents often have several roles to fulfil. Being overburdened with multiple responsibilities and playing the role of both parents, has rendered the experience of being a single parent demanding and challenging for most of the participants. Some of those interviewed described single parenting as “*taxing*”, “*hard work*” and “*playing two roles*”, which is consistent with the view of Matthews (2011), who highlights that single mothers are at risk of developing poor mental and physical health as a result of performing multiple roles.

While single parents are often admired for performing the duties of both parents, two of the study participants were adamant that single parenting isn't ideal, having come to realise the difference it made when having the other parent around to lighten the burden and share the responsibilities of raising the children. This is also acknowledged by Stephen and Udisi

(2016), who emphasised that the overload in accumulation of roles by the single parent evokes negative psychological outcomes for the children.

One single mother reported: *“With single parenting, you have to be the mother and the father. I never wanted to play that role, my son’s father was shot and killed last year and I told my son from the beginning, “Ek gaan nie Pa speel nie”, because I’m not a father.”* It appeared that adopting the roles of a single parent after losing a spouse who died resulted in a sense of frustration for three single mothers. As one said: *“If my husband was still here, it wouldn’t be so hard.”* These findings suggest that the sudden breakdown of the families caused some single-parent households to experience emotional distress and a decline in moral support. This was further exacerbated for those study participants without extended family to lean on. As one said: *“I don’t have any friends and my family lives in Mosselbaai, we are not in contact with each other which is quite hard.”*

The findings also suggest that a few participants’ ability or inability to successfully fulfil the roles and expectations of the absent parent has implications for the ways in which these participants measure their worth as single parents. For example, one single mother’s insecurity is the fear of *“failing her children”*, since she feels restricted in her role as a mother to satisfy the roles of the ‘father’ in the household. Those single parents experiencing a difficult time fulfilling the roles and expectations of the absent parent usually seek guidance and assistance from a respected authority figure or a fellow church congregant.

5.3.4 Moral Obligation

For a long time, societal perceptions and attitudes towards single parenthood characterised single parents as *“morally inferior”*, *“inadequate”* and a *“detriment”* to society. These one-dimensional views towards single parenthood are still heavily influenced by the negative connotations attached to the ‘single parent’ status. While the findings of this study cannot be

generalised as applicable to all churches, the church leaders who were interviewed displayed an optimistic and curious attitude towards single parents, presenting a different way of perceiving single parenthood within the church.

The church leaders perceive single parenting as a moral responsibility and believe that single parents have a moral obligation towards God and their children. By upholding their responsibilities, single parents are fulfilling the task that God has chosen for them. The church leaders also acknowledge that the church has a moral duty towards single parents, and that contrary to popular belief, children from single-parent families are able to flourish under those circumstances. These views challenge the assumptions that all churches are stigmatising single parenthood and that single parents are “*subordinate*” to other church congregants.

Ultimately not all single-parent families should be held to the same standard, since the circumstances that give rise to single parenthood are different for each single-parent family. Begging the question: Is there any real basis for the negative attitudes towards single parents other than membership of the group? This suggests that the ideologies surrounding the single-parent family amounts to nothing more than people hiding behind religion to oppress and demonise single parents for not conforming to socially constructed norms and values. Furthermore, the socially constructed norms create the impression that those who conform to tradition are equated to being “*better*” Christians than their single-parent counterparts. For example, one participant reported: “*As a single parent, you feel like there is something wrong with you and you rather feel like you are the sinner and married people are righteous*” (Participant 4).

While it may be incorrect to question an individual's moral character based on being a single parent, it appears that all the negative connotations attached to the "*single parent*" status outweigh personal character, which could explain the bitterness towards single parents.

5.4 PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS SINGLE PARENTS WITHIN THE CHURCH

The main issues raised by the participants were alienation and discrimination, acceptance and forgiveness, stigma and labelling, and that church support is critical

5.4.1 Alienation and Discrimination

Attending church has been alienating for two participants who felt strongly that the church tends to discriminate against single parents, whether directly or indirectly. "*The church does place us in categories... you feel discriminated against. As single people, we don't feel like we belong in the church*" (Participant 5). Since single parenting is not directly addressed in the bible, there appeared to be a level of uncertainty amongst some of the study participants about the position of single parents in the church. For example, one single parent explicitly claimed that she felt discriminated and abandoned within the church. This view is supported by Makhubele (2008:118) who argues that "*single mothers felt unaccepted by the church, to the extent that many were willing to leave the church.*"

According to the participant, the church has a tendency to place congregants in particular categories. The participant expressed the views that there isn't a particular set of principles or biblical scriptures directed at single parents with reference to what single parents should and shouldn't do, and that there isn't any clarity as to where or how single parents "*fit in*" at the church – which has left her feeling confused and perplexed.

While it may not have been the intention of the church to purposively “*exclude*” single parents, those interviewed felt that the church is conveying a message that not belonging to a particular group is perceived as being “*problematic*”. Which prompts one to ask: Is the church indirectly ostracising the single parent community?

Based on the above-mentioned points, it seems that the “*single parent*” status, and the particular “*categories*” that are used to distinguish between single parents and fellow church congregants that the participant alluded to, have negative implications for the moral status of single parents. Furthermore, the “*categories*” create an impression that the single-parent status is considered a “*measure*” of one’s religious faith.

5.4.2 Acceptance and Forgiveness

Self-forgiveness and acceptance was difficult for many participants. Dealing with divorce or having conceived out of wedlock contributed to feelings of inadequacy amongst some single parents. “*In the beginning, after the divorce I felt inferior. Sometimes I felt that this church did not cater for single parents because it’s all about supporting marriages.*” Two single parents said that even though they felt morally inferior as parents in the beginning stages of single parenthood, they came to discover that their own self-criticism had contributed to them feeling “*different*” from other members in their congregations and had come to realise that as far as practising Christianity is concerned, there isn’t a “*discrepancy*” between single parents and those who are married.

Makhubele (2008) found that single mothers are accused of having a hidden agenda, and in this study one participant said she was accused of being “*too friendly*” with a male counterpart in the church, acknowledging that she avoids church socials as a result of this incident. “*The church had a valentine’s dinner, now you come alone and other congregants will come with their husbands or whatever... and I was accused of being too friendly with one*

of the male congregants and it hurt me but I have decided not to attend any of the church events, but this is the type of things that happens in the church, so you always have to be aware” (Participant 2).

Are some church congregants intentionally victimising and exploiting single parents to further their own personal agendas? It appears that within the church, single parents are using marriage as a standard against which they measure themselves. It also appears that married people are considered “*morally superior*” to single parents and that, based on the incident mentioned above, merely associating with “married people” is considered a privilege that single parents aren’t entitled to.

5.4.3 Stigma and Labelling

Single parents remain a stigmatised group both within and outside of the church. Likewise, the children of single-parent families also become the target of humiliation and shame. One of the single mothers believed that society and the church were also inclined to victimise the children of single parent families by holding them to a different standard.

“Society is labelling single parents’ children which to me are taboo. Why do they always single out? I’m not agreeing with the concept of putting labels on single parents’ children... If my child falls pregnant then society labels them “oh, it’s because she’s a single parent, so what, we expected it” but if a pastor’s child falls pregnant or starts using drugs, then they overlook it” (Participant 17).

Since single parenthood is considered a “*risk*” to the development of children, the stigma attributed to the children of single-parent families is discussed at length in previously-published literature on single parenthood, as is tendency of children from single parent households to have low expectations. It has been reported that the children of single-parent

families are more inclined to experience deficits in their psychological, social and behavioural development (Udansky, 2003). Moreover, the effects of single parenthood negatively impacts educational attainment, identity development and successes in life (Russo and Clark, n.d.)

Indeed, while not all the assumptions about the single-parent family are true, it appears that the “*short-comings*” attributed to single parenthood are used as an “*excuse*” to justify labelling and the low expectations of the children of single-parent families.

Drefrain and Eirick (1981) found that single mothers are often stigmatised. Stemming from discrimination, feelings of shame, failure, inferiority and alienation, the labels placed on single parent families have negatively affected their access to church support structure. That stigmatising attitudes evoke feelings of “*shame*” is a sub-theme that emerged within this theme, and it appears that feelings of shame, amongst other factors, definitely place limits on and hinder the opportunity of seeking support from and developing social capital through the church. As some single parents said: “*You don’t even know the person is struggling because they feel ashamed.*”

5.4.4 Church Support is Critical

“There had been times where I felt not enough has been done for single parents” (Participant 11). *“I would say that single parenting should be an important focus of the church because there are parents that do need help”* (Participant 1).

Putman (2000) maintained that religious participation, or being affiliated with a religious community, is associated with higher levels of social capital. While this rings true to a certain extent, frequent attendance and participation in a church/religious community does not always equate to social support and higher levels of social capital. Based upon the results of

this study, perceived social support is different for single parents in the church. That the church needs to assist and support single parents in the congregation cannot be overstated. Every single-parent participant perceived the level of church support was lower or lacking.

On one hand, there appeared to be a sense amongst a few participants that more needed to be done on behalf of the church in being accommodating and offering support to single parents in the congregation. On the other hand, accessing support and building social capital through the church requires effort on behalf of the social agent. As one participant remarked: *“Single parents must speak up if they need help.”* Thus single parents as social agents have a responsibility to reach out for support and assistance if they want to improve their circumstances, and by isolating themselves or *“suffering in silence”*, single parents hamper the chance to remedy their circumstances. Of course, the church being of assistance to single parents depends on the specific needs/challenges of the single parent, and the availability/types of resources of the church or the lack thereof could impede on the church’s capacity to offer support and accommodate single parents. The church can be supportive and accommodating towards single parents to the extent that it can fulfil the needs and remedy the challenges of the single parent with the resources or supportive structures of the church.

5.5 CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY SINGLE PARENTS IN THE CHURCH

This theme explores the challenges that single parents encounter within the church, which consisted of: role modelling and mentorship, obtaining practical assistance, lack of support from the church, finances, peer pressure, time, discipline and seeking advice.

5.5.1 Role Modelling and Mentorship

“When my children were younger and I was worried about my son not having a father figure, my son needs mentorship because there are certain things I cannot teach him”

(Participant 9).

When one of the parents (whether it be the mother or father) is no longer an active participant in the lives of their children, this seems to present challenges for the remaining parent during certain phases of their children’s lives. Woods (2010) noted that the stage of puberty presented a series of challenges for single fathers who were raising daughters. Discipline surfaced as a challenge for a few single parents, reporting that they require additional support with parenting-related issues. Based on one participant’s experience, family involvement and criticism proved to be challenging and counterproductive when it came to disciplining the children. Furthermore, teaching children about gender roles and expectations proved to be challenging for both single mothers and fathers in this study.

Attending church can play a pivotal role in socialising the children of single parents (Sheets, 2014), especially when the parents require extra guidance and assistance from a member or authority figure of the church when imparting knowledge and skills during certain phases of the children’s development. With the task of socialising children in the absence of the mother/father presenting a challenge during certain phases of single parenthood, two participants saw value in the church introducing a mentorship programme for the children of single-parent families. *“Have a mentorship programme, which would be awesome... Have a group of men in the church, sign up and place a child who does not have a father in the care and mentorship of these men”* (Participant 8).

The mentorship programme would be a way of constructively managing challenging behaviour and, more importantly, the role of a mentorship programme would be to instil

morals, values and a sense of identity in the children while simultaneously providing additional support to single parents by guiding, directing and assisting them with their children.

5.5.2 Limited/Lack of Support by the Church

“I can’t say that the church has provided support except for my cell leader and his wife who were always there to just let me vent, speak and provide advice, but I don’t believe that there are any structures in the church to support single parents” (Participant 6).

A few of the study participants spoke about the lack of support received or the limited availability of supportive structures for single parents at their churches. One participant maintained that you are forced to find a support system at your own discretion, whether within or outside of the church, and while she found no support in place, she formed a support group of her own with other single parents from the congregation. Since the members of this group shared similar experiences, needs and challenges, they have created an environment in which they feel comfortable to voice their concerns without fear of judgement. The lack of church resources along with congregants being ill-equipped exacerbates the lack of support offered to single parents.

5.5.3 Obtaining Practical Assistance

“To have something fixed in the house. Unfortunately my brother stays far away from me and very seldom makes the effort to come and see me” (Participant 17).

Repairing things in and around the house had proved frustrating for two single mothers who maintained that it was one of the disadvantages of being a single parent. They needed practical assistance, and while they couldn’t rely on the church in this regard, so desperate

were these single mothers that they often approached members of the congregation in the hope that getting help.

“Finances” can be a challenge for single-parent families and Williams (2012) found that single parent households are more inclined to experience poverty. Two of the study participants acknowledged that finances are among the biggest challenges that they encounter. One participant admitted that she found it incredibly difficult to accept periods where she is unable to uphold her financial obligation to her children. Learning to budget as a single parent was critical for two of the study participants, and one found it incredibly frustrating when she had no money left.

“Time” also emerged as a challenge raised by study participants. *“Time is a big challenge. The challenge is always trying to be everywhere at the same time.”* Cheeseman (2010) and Tehan (2007) also found time management to be a challenge amongst single parents. Two participants reported that time – or the lack thereof – is strenuous, and emphasised that there are either too many responsibilities that require their time and attention or too many places they have to be.

“Peer pressure” was also listed as a challenge for single parents. It has been reported that the children from single-parent households are more prone to peer pressure and more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour which stems from the effects of single-parent households (Abreu, 2011; Meyer, Moore and Viljoen, 2008). Two single mothers found that their children are being easily influenced by their peers. Furthermore, one single mother revealed that her approach to managing challenging behaviour exhibited by her son wasn't always effective and she frequently required the father to step in with discipline issues.

“Limited supportive channels” also emerged as a theme for single parents. *“Sometimes you just want to talk because the children make you angry and sometimes they do things that you*

don't want them to do and you just want to confide in someone, but you can't really so that makes it difficult.” Weinraub (1983) found that single mothers often receive less emotional support, and likewise, two of the study participants reiterated that seeking advice, or even just venting about the struggles of single parenthood, proved to be challenging – especially when it came to decision-making concerning their children. As reported by one single mother: *“The decision-making ultimately relies on the parents at the end of the day, and you don't have somebody who you can consult with before making drastic decisions”* (Participant 2).

5.6 CURRENT CHURCH SUPPORT STRUCTURES

There are mixed reviews concerning support offered to single parents by the church, and this study was conducted across three different churches. *“Because of the division within the church, you are not sure can you talk about your issues that you are going through, and who you can consult with... Like I said, there isn't a system in place to support the single parents. Sometimes you faced with, should we as single parents talk about our issues or should we just keep quiet”* (Participant 9).

“By ons kerk is hulle baie supportive, nou nie finansieel nie maar soos ek gesê het, hulle luister na jou en dit laat n mens baie goed voel” (Participant 4).

Some single parents feel there is no support from their church, while others are adamant that the church does offer support. At one of the Kuils River churches, while some of the study participants reported that there has been support offered by the church, they emphasised that the single parent should also take responsibility and speak up if they needed help. One single mother reported that: *“Our church offers victory weekend, which is a weekend-long programme that offers psychological healing for anyone in need and it was this programme*

that made me realize how much emotional baggage I was carrying” (Participant 5). Another participant was adamant that the church would offer support to a point where the single parent could help themselves, stressing that it is unrealistic for single parents to expect the church to step in and help out every time. Other single parents from the same church reported that there wasn't really support offered, other than the advice that they've received from their prayer group leaders.

At one of the other churches, the majority of the survey participants reported that there is no support offered for single parents, however one of them acknowledged that the church started a social club for the single parents but that it had failed because the single parents weren't satisfied with the kind of support the church was offering. The same participant also reported that many single parents endured psychological and emotional trauma and preferred that the church assist them in that area as opposed to organising social gatherings for single parents. One single father felt that people at the church are hesitant to assist single parents because they don't want to get involved or aren't equipped to help out.

The third of the churches included in the study had started an organisation that makes provision for single parents, widows and everybody who does not 'fit in', and the organisation had become the main source of support for many single parents from this church. As some single parents are hesitant to send their children to church at certain ages, the support organisation recruited caregivers to supervise the children while their parents attended church services.

5.6.1 Ways in which the church can further assist single parents

A number of study participants made suggestions of the different ways in which they feel the church can be accommodating towards the single parents in the church.

It was suggested that the church offer “*shuttle services*” for single parents in the congregation to ease the stress of travelling to and from church. To minimise the disturbance to members in the congregation, one study participant suggested that during services the church offer “*supervision*” to the children of single parent families, making particular reference to toddlers. Another participant proposed that “*scheduling church services and Sunday school concurrently*” would be more time-efficient for single parents but would also limit the extent to which the children imposed on the single parents’ time in church. “*The failure of church leaders to acknowledge single parents and the challenges of single parent families*” left one participant feeling upset about the treatment of single parents in the church. It was suggested that the church leaders start recognising the needs and challenges of single parent families as a way of displaying concern and showing support to single parents in the congregation.

5.7 COPING STRATEGIES

This theme looks at the various coping strategies single parents employ to deal with the challenges they face, which consisted of prayer, communication, religion, music and sleep.

Prayer proved to be an important coping strategy for the single parents in the congregation who reported a sense of comfort and relief when they prayed about their struggles/challenges.

The role of *communication* was also identified as an important aspect in seeking help/assistance from the church, disciplining the children as well as resolving disputes and disagreements amongst family relatives. In line with this, many study participants reported that they confided in either their church leader or someone who experienced the same challenges as they did. All of the participants drew strength and guidance from their *religion* and reiterated the importance of frequently reading the bible and attending church in working through their obstacles. This view is similar to that of Sheets (2014), who found that single

mothers turn to religion to cope with their challenges. *Music* was also identified as a coping strategy, with one participant having found solace in listening to gospel music and who received spiritual guidance and biblical tools that aided in addressing daily challenges. For one single mother, *sleep* was also reported as an important method of facing challenges. She emphasised that sleeping was helpful and important for sustaining overall wellbeing, which is critical, especially for a single parent.

5.8 SUPPORT STRUCTURES

The support structures of the single parents included: family and friends, neighbours, church/religion and counselling services.

Family and *friends* are considered important sources of social capital and were identified by six participants as the biggest system of support. The participants reported that they can depend on family and friends to assist with babysitting, raising the children or contributing financially to the household. This is consistent with Williams (2012), who found that single mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds are more inclined to live with their parents, who automatically become the providers of childcare and financial assistance. *Neighbours* and *church/religion* were also identified as sources of moral support, especially by those participants who had no extended family or were living apart from their extended family. This is consistent with Petts and Knoester (2007), who found religion to be valuable in facilitating social interaction and developing social networks.

Two single parents found frequent consultation with a mental health professional to be an important source of encouragement and support. *"I have a beautiful psychologist that I*

continually see. If I feel that life is becoming overwhelming, I consult with my psychologist every two to three weeks” (Participant 5).

5.9 THE EMERGENCE OF SINGLE PARENTS WITHIN THE CHURCH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

5.9.1 Single Parenting and Conservative Values

“I think in terms of values, standard and norms, it is the single’s who should be moving into a space and feeling vocal enough to discuss how the above-mentioned is impacting them” (Participant 1).

Failure to embrace change, conservative religious beliefs and patterns of thought are largely responsible for the prejudiced attitudes towards single parents and the damaging ways single parenting is presented to society and perceived within the church. The church leaders acknowledged the role that conservative religious beliefs have contributed to the perception that the status of being single is considered “threatening” within certain contexts. This view is similar to that of Makhubele (2008), who reported that people in the church are suspicious of single mothers and perceive them to have ulterior motives. The church leaders reported that these normative patterns of thought surrounding single parents are what society has become accustomed to without challenging them. While believers were taught to wait until marriage to bear children, the environment we live in doesn’t always function in that manner. As one participant maintained, the church shouldn’t be against single parenting, because it is inevitable, and that how the church manages single parenting should take preference.

In light of this transition in the family forms, participants maintained that the church doesn't discriminate but is inclusive, always advocating that everybody is welcome in the church regardless of their background, because they realise that people are struggling.

Encouraging people to *become vocal* was another sub-theme that emerged, and one church leader stressed the importance of single parents starting to voice their opinions and confronting the ideologies and stereotypes that have defined single parents for so long. Church leaders are encouraging single parents to take the initiative and verbalise their needs, concerns and struggles if they are seeking assistance from the church. One of the study participants reported that single parents and those who identify as being 'single' have been socialised to think that they should remain silent, and that the role of the church is to help this group discover that they are also entitled to their opinion by creating a context in which single parents' voices can be heard. The participant also emphasised that the church should create opportunities, workshops and seminars in which congregants could talk about being 'single' and encourage single parents to share their untold stories.

Single parenting was perceived as an *opportunity* and a *challenge*, which also surfaced as a sub-theme. The church leaders conceded that single parenting presents the church with an opportunity to search for practical ways where the church could assist single parents in addressing their challenges. The church leaders also maintained that single parenting forced the church to identify their own shortcomings in failing to support and accommodate single parents in the congregation.

5.9.2 Different ways church leaders have/can assist single parents

The suggestions made by the church leaders in trying to accommodate single parents in the congregation included a *series of workshops* through their men and women's ministry to address topics such as single fatherhood and single motherhood. These have been attempted

on behalf of the church. At one of the churches, the goal of *parent evenings* is to assist struggling parents by imparting certain skills, whether they be addressing discipline issues or practising money management skills. Since the church congregations are big, the value of *smaller prayer groups* in providing access to support for single parents cannot be overstated.

The church leaders were confident that organising an exclusive “*single parent day*”, or an event for single parents, would be the perfect opportunity for the single parents to unburden themselves, and for the church leaders to become familiar with the trials of single parenthood so that the church can develop strategies to address those specific challenges.

Also highlighted was the *lack of communication* between the church leaders and single parents. “*Instead of talking about single parents, we should be talking to them,*” which was one of the reasons why single parents were hesitant or unable to obtain assistance from the church. The church leaders also recognised that their failure to communicate and reach out to single parents may have communicated a message that there isn’t support or assistance of any kind offered by the church. The single parents have acknowledged that their silence and failure to signal for help might have created the false impression that the single parents in the congregation are coping. The church leaders reiterated the importance of continuously engaging with single parents to help the church understand how best to help and serve their needs.

The suggestion to implement a single-parent ministry as a way of accommodating single parents in the congregation was well received by all the church leaders. Implementing a single-parent ministry would encourage an inclusive environment in the church for single parents to be recognised, accepted and understood. One of the church leaders also considered a single-parent ministry as an opportunity for members of the church to acknowledge their role in disregarding single parents in the congregation. However, as much as the church

leaders valued the significance of implementing a single-parent ministry, they also realised that it was a big commitment that required resources and skills which the church lacked. In addition, since the church leaders were already overwhelmed with duties, they stressed that it would be strenuous to take on another responsibility of this magnitude without having additional help and the proper resources in place.

5.10 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

5.10.1 Subjective views and attitudes towards single parenting

The pre-existing attitudes towards single parenting has always been fairly negative, which mainly stems from the fixation on the negative aspects of single parenting, yet while the literature has thoroughly explored the negative effects of single parenting, it appears that not all the assumptions are true. This thesis explored the subjective views towards single parenting through the lens of single parents and church leaders, providing both the opportunity to express their views. A range of sub-themes emerged which will be discussed.

For many of the study participants, adjusting to single parenthood was eye-opening and a valuable learning experience. Participants expressed the view that since becoming single parents, they had developed a profound sense of maturity, attributing their resilience to single parenting. It is also clear from the results that many participants deemed single parenting a source of motivation, making particular reference to their children, which ties in with previous literature (Cheeseman, 2010) that found single parenting to be a source of determination amongst single mothers.

Evidently a few participants were conflicted by feelings of guilt and sympathy. Participants expressed sympathy for their children, emphasising that adapting to single parenthood had

influenced their parenting, and it appeared that the participants felt guilty when they tend to overlook their children's behaviour. Furthermore, some participants were confronted with feelings of inadequacy about their abilities to successfully fulfil the roles and expectations of the absent parent. These findings are supported by previous literature, according to which feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy are common amongst single mothers raising sons (Gearing and Campbell, 2000).

Most of the study participants agreed that single parenting is challenging and demanding. The sudden breakdown of the family through losing a spouse who had passed away had left three participants feeling frustrated, emotionally distressed, lacking support and overwhelmed with responsibilities.

One participant declared that she wouldn't wish single parenting on her enemy. She stressed the importance of abstaining as far as possible from raising children until one is emotionally equipped and financially capable. Another participant remarked that a good report card and seeing the children happy made single parenting worthwhile. On the whole, single parenting was associated with undesirable outcomes that have been thoroughly investigated in previous literature (Stephen and Udisi, 2016; Mathews, 2011), although not all the assumptions always ring true.

The church leaders interviewed were open-minded and displayed a positive attitude towards single parenting. They emphasised that it can be taxing and identified the stigma associated with this group of individuals. One church leader declared that she had no objection to single parenting, while another believed that single parenting is a moral responsibility. Furthermore, participants in the study stressed that the church has a moral duty to guide and assist single parents but also to ensure that single parents are successful in raising their children and securing their futures.

5.10.2 Perceptions towards single parents within the church

Alienation and discrimination was the first theme that surfaced, with one of the study participants stressing that the church rarely accommodates single parents and is more concerned with serving the needs of married couples, pushing the narrative that “*being married*” is setting the proper example in church. A sense of failure and shame was widespread amongst participants who weren’t coping well with the pressures of single parenting, which explained why so many single parents rarely speak up when they need assistance, and why the majority of participants stressed that single parenting should become an important focus of the church. One participant acknowledged that she had a dispute with the church leaders about single parents, emphasising that single parents should be recognised and not pushed aside.

Acceptance and forgiveness also surfaced as a theme, and for some participants, adopting the role of a single parent resulted in feeling morally inferior to other church congregants. The “*single parent*” status created a “*distinction*” between church congregants to the extent that some single parents felt “*unworthy*” as believers. It appeared that the “*single parent*” status became a “*measure*” of personal character and religious faith. Simultaneously, the feelings of inferiority and alienation experienced by some participants during the beginning stages of single parenthood also stemmed from their negative self-judgement and irrational beliefs. The road to self-acceptance and forgiveness remained a challenge for some participants, while others had come to realise that “*single parent*” status does not have any bearing on moral character or religious faith.

Stigma and labelling emerged as another theme, with both single parents and their children are affected by this. One single mother believed that there was a double standard in the church, where the children of single parent families were being scrutinized, victimised and

held to a higher moral standard than other children. Furthermore, the participant commented on the role that the church played in causing the children of single-parent families to feel unnecessarily inferior. It is clear from the results that stigmatising attitudes towards single parents resulted in feelings of shame and inferiority, which negatively impacted access to social capital and support.

Regarding the views/perceptions in relation to the church being supportive towards single parents, some single parents acknowledged that the church is supportive towards them while other single parents held opposing views. Most of the participants agreed that the church should be doing more to accommodate them. Although the ability of the church to offer support and create space to establish social capital depends on the resources of the church. Moreover, seeking support and accessing/building social capital through the church also requires effort on the part of the single parents. Single parents have an obligation to be vocal about their concerns and challenges if they want to improve their current circumstances – failure to reach out will exacerbate feelings of helplessness and alienation that some participants already experience.

5.10.3 Challenges experienced by single parents in the church

Role modelling and mentorship were the first challenges to be raised. Both single mothers and fathers indicated that at certain stages in the lives of their children, fulfilling the role of the other parent proves challenging, and therefore many single parents looked to the church in search of role models to oversee the roles of the absent parent. One of the study participants emphasised the importance of the church introducing a mentorship programme to instruct, guide and advise the children of single-parent families.

Lack of support by the church is another challenge that emerged, stemming from limited resources and people being ill-equipped to assist single parents in the congregation.

Obtaining practical assistance from the church was also reported as a challenge, especially by single mothers in the study who are finding it difficult to repair things in and around the house. Finances appeared to be a challenge in single-parent households, and in literature on the subject (Drefrain and Eirick 1981) it was found that single women tend to have lower-paying jobs than do single men. Lack of time also surfaced as a challenge for some participants, and in previous literature (Tehan , 2007; Cheeseman, 2010) time management was found to be a problem amongst single parents. Excessive travelling, peer pressure and disciplinary issues were also reported as challenges faced by participants in the study. Self-pity and negative self-judgement were also characterised as challenges for single parents, but the participants were adamant that the insecurities of single parents could also contribute to them feeling inferior and ‘judged’ by members of the church. Poor sleeping habits and struggling to find a caregiver to supervise the children also surfaced as challenges among participants with limited supportive structures that rendered decision-making difficult for those unable to seek advice when needed.

5.10.4 Different ways in which the church can assist single parents

Participants provided a number of ways the church can assist single parents, moving forward. It was suggested that the church should invest in a shuttle service for single parents to provide transportation to and from church. Because of time constraints, one of the single parents advocated scheduling church services and Sunday school at the same time. It was also felt that the church should provide supervision for the children in a separate area, so that single parents can attend church services in peace, without distractions. Furthermore, it was reported that single parents just wanted to be recognised as a group within the church, and that if the church wanted to help single parents it was important for the church to acknowledge that the needs and challenges of single parents are different to those of married people. In addition, it

was suggested that the church have a programme to donate food hampers and household essentials to single-parent families, because food insecurity is a massive problem for single parents. Having small support groups, scheduling supportive meetings and including single parents in church events were also identified as ways in which the church could facilitate single parents.

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 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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